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UNDER TWO FLAGS

A STORY OF

THE HOUSEHOLD AND THE DESERT.

By OUIDA,

AUTHOR OF "STRATHMORE," "CHANDOS," "IDALIA," &c.

"*Cœur Vaillant se fait Royaume.*"

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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UNDER TWO FLAGS.

CHAPTER I.

“L'AMIE DU DRAPEAU.”

“DID I not say he would eat fire?”

“Pardieu! *c'est un brave.*”

“Rides like an Arab.”

“Smokes like a Zouave.”

“Cuts off a head with that back circular sweep,
ah—h—h! magnificent!”

“And dances like an Aristocrat; not like a tipsy
Spahis!”

The last crown to the chorus of applause, and insult to the circle of applauders, was launched with all the piquance of inimitable canteen-slang and camp-assurance, from a speaker who had perched astride on a broken fragment of wall, with her barrel of wine set up on end on the stones in front of her, and her six soldiers, her *gros bébés* as she was given maternally to calling them, lounging at their ease on

the arid dusty turf below. She was very pretty, audaciously pretty, though her skin was burnt to a bright sunny brown, and her hair was cut as short as a boy's, and her face had not one regular feature in it. But then — regularity ! who wanted it, who would have thought the most pure classic type a change for the better, with those dark, dancing, challenging eyes, with that arch, brilliant, kitten-like face, so sunny, so *mignon*, and those scarlet lips like a bud of camellia that were never so handsome as when a cigarette was between them, or, sooth to say, not seldom a *brûle gueule* itself ?

She was pretty, she was insolent, she was intolerably coquettish, she was mischievous as a mar-moset, she would swear if need be like a Zouave, she could fire galloping, she could toss off her brandy or her vermout like a trooper, she would on occasion clench her little brown hand and deal a blow that the recipient would not covet twice, she was an *enfant de Paris*, and had all its wickedness at her fingers, she would sing you *guinguette* songs till you were suffocated with laughter, and she would dance the *cancan* at the Salle de Mars with the biggest giant of a Cuirassier there. And yet, with all that, she was not wholly unsexed, with all that she had the delicious fragrance of youth, and had not left a certain feminine grace behind her, though she wore a vivandière's uniform, and had been born in a barrack, and meant to die in a battle ; it was the blending of the two that made her piquante, made her a notoriety in her own

way; known at pleasure, and equally, in the Army of Africa as "Cigarette," and "L'Amie du Drapeau."

"Not like a tipsy Spahis!" it was a cruel cut to her *gros bébés*, mostly Spahis, lying there at her feet, or rather at the foot of the wall, singing their praises—with magnanimity beyond praise—of a certain Chasseur d'Afrique.

"Ho, Cigarette!" growled a little Zouave, known as Tata Leroux. "That is the way thou forsakest thy friends for the first fresh face."

"Well, it is not a face like a tobacco-stopper, as thine is, Tata!" responded Cigarette, with a puff of her namesake; the repartee of the camp is apt to be rough. "He is *Bel-à-faire-peur*, as you nickname him."

"A woman's face!" growled the injured Tata; whose own countenance was of the colour and well-nigh of the flatness of one of the red bricks of the wall.

"Ouf!" said the Friend of the Flag with more expression in that single ejaculation than could be put in a volume. "He does woman's deeds, does he? He has woman's hands, but they can fight, I fancy? Six Arabs to his own sword the other day in that skirmish! Superb!"

"Sapristi! And what did he say, this droll, when he looked at them lying there? Just shrugged his shoulders and rode away. 'I'd better have killed myself, less mischief on the whole!' Now, who is to make anything of such a man as that?"

"Ah! he did not stop to cut their gold buttons off, and steal their cangiars as thou wouldst have done, Tata? Well! he has not learnt *la guerre*," laughed Cigarette. "It was a waste; he should have brought me their sashes at least. By the way—when did he join?"

"Ten—twelve—years ago, or thereabouts."

"He should have learnt to strip Arabs by this time, then," said the Amie du Drapeau, turning the tap of her barrel to replenish the wine-cup; "and to steal from them too, living or dead. *Thou* must take him in hand, Tata!"

Tata laughed, considering that he had received a compliment.

"Diable! I did a neat thing yesterday. Out on the hills, there, was a shepherd; he'd got two live geese swinging by their feet. They were screeching—screeching—screeching!—and they looked so nice and so plump, that I could smell them, as if they were stewing in a casserole, till I began to get as hungry as a *gamin*. A lunge would just have cut the question at once; but the orders have got so strict potting about the natives, I thought I wouldn't have any violence, if the thing would go nice and smoothly. So I just walked behind him, and tripped him up before he knew where he was;—it was a picture! He was down with his face in the sand before you could sing Tra-la-la! Then I just sat upon him; but gently—very gently: and what with the sand, and the heat, and the surprise, and, in truth,

perhaps, a little too my own weight, he was half suffocated. He had never seen me; he did not know what it was that was sitting on him; and I sent my voice out with a roar—"I am a demon, and the fiend hath bidden me take him thy soul to-night!" Ah! how he began to tremble, and to kick, and to quiver. He thought it was the devil a-top of him; and he began to moan, as well as the sand would let him, that he was a poor man, and an innocent, and the geese were the only things he ever stole in all his life. Then I went through a little pantomime with him, and I was very terrible in my threats, and he was choking and choking with the sand, though he never let go of the geese. At last, I relented a little, and told him I would spare him that once, if he gave up the stolen goods, and never lifted his head for an hour. Sapristi! how glad he was of the terms! I dare say my weight was unpleasant; so the geese made us a divine stew that night, and the last thing I saw of my man was his lying flat as I left him, with his face still down in the sand-hole."

Cigarette nodded and laughed.

"Pretty fair, Tata; but I have heard better. Bah! a grand thing certainly, to fright a peasant, and scamper off with a goose!"

"Sacre-bleu!" grumbled Tata, who was himself of opinion that his exploit had been worthy of the feats of Harlequin; "thy heart is all gone to the Englishman."

Cigarette laughed saucily and heartily, tickled at

the joke. Sentiment has an exquisitely ludicrous side when one is a *vivandière aux yeux noirs*, perched astride on a wall, and dispensing brandy-dashed wine to half a dozen sun-baked Spahis.

"Vivandière du régiment,
C'est Catin qu'on me nomme ;
Je vends, je donne, je bois gaiement,
Mon vin et mon rogomme :
J'ai le pied leste et l'œil mutin,
Tintin, tintin, tintin, r'lin tintin,
Soldats, voilà Catin !"

she sang with the richest, freshest, mellowest voice that ever chanted the deathless refrains of the French Lucilius.

"My heart is a *réveil-matin*, Tata ; it wakes fresh every day. An Englishman, perdie ! Why dost thou think him that ?"

"Because he is a giant," said Tata.

Cigarette snapped her fingers :

"I have danced with Grenadiers and Cuirassiers quite as tall, and twice as heavy. *Après ?*"

"Because he bathes—splash ! like any water-dog."

"Because he is silent."

"Because he rises in his stirrups."

"Because he likes the sea."

"Because he knows *le boxe*."

"Because he is so quiet, and blazes like the devil underneath."

Under which mass of overwhelming proofs of nationality the *Amie du Drapeau* gave in.

"Yes, like enough. Besides, the other one is

English. *Lour-i-loo*, of the *Chasses-marais*,* tells me that the other one waits on him like a slave when he can—cleans his harness, litters his horse, saves him all the hard work, when he can do it without being found out. Where did they come from?"

"They will never tell."

Cigarette tossed her nonchalant head, with a pout of her cherry lips, and a slang oath, light as a bird, wicked as a *rigolbochade*.

"Paf!—they will tell it to me!"

"Chut! Thou mayst make a lion tame, a vulture leave blood, a drum beat its own rataplan, a dead man fire a *clarinette*† à six pieds; but thou wilt never make an Englishman speak when he is bent to be silent."

Cigarette launched a choice missile of barrack slang at an array of metaphors which their propounder thought stupendous in their brilliancy.

"*Bécasse*! When you stole your geese, you did but take your brethren home! Englishmen are but men. Put the wine in their head, make them whirl in a waltz, promise them a kiss, and one turns such brains as they have inside out, as a *piou-piou* turns a dead soldier's wallet. When a woman is handsome, she is never denied. He shall tell me where he comes from. I doubt that it is from England; see here—why not?" and she checked the Noes off on her lithe brown fingers: "first, he never says God-damn; second, he don't eat his meat raw; third, he speaks

* *Chasseurs d'Afrique*.

A musket.

very soft; fourth, he waltzes so light, so light! fifth, he never grumbles in his throat like an angry bear; sixth, there is no fog in him. How can he be English with all that?"

"There are English, and English," said the philosophic Tata, who piqued himself on being serenely cosmopolitan.

Cigarette blew a contemptuous puff of smoke.

"There was never one yet that did not growl! *Pauvres diables!* if they don't use their tusks, they sit and sulk!—an Englishman is always boxing or grumbling;—the two make up his life."

Which view of *Anglo-rabies* she had derived from a profound study of various vaudevilles, in which the traditional God-damn was pre-eminent in his usual hues; and having delivered it, she sprang down from her wall, strapped on her little *barillet*, nodded to her gros bébéés, where they lounged full length in the shadow of the stone wall, and left them to resume their game at Boc, while she started on her way, as swift and as light as a chamois, singing, with gay ringing emphasis, that echoed all down the hot and silent air, the second verse of Béranger:

"Je fus chère à tous nos héros;
Hélas! combien j'en pleure,
Ainsi soldats et généraux
Me comblaient à tout heure,
D'amour de gloire et de butin,
Tintin, tintin, tintin, r'lin tintin,
D'amour de gloire et de butin,
Soldats, voilà Catin!"

The song was not altogether her song, however,

for she had wept for none—wept not at all : she had never shed tears in her life. A dashing, dauntless, vivacious life, just in its youth, loving plunder, and mischief, and mirth ; caring for nothing ; and always ready with a laugh, a song, a slang repartee, or a shot from the dainty pistols thrust in her sash, that a general of division had given her, whichever best suited the moment.

Her mother a camp-follower, her father nobody knew who, a spoilt child of the Army from her birth, with a heart as bronzed as her cheek, and her respect for the laws of meum and tuum *nil*, yet with odd stray nature-sown instincts here and there, of a devil-may-care nobility, and of a wild grace that nothing could kill—Cigarette was the pet of the Army of Africa, and was as lawless as most of her patrons.

She would eat a succulent duck, thinking it all the spicier because it had been a soldier's "loot ;" she would wear the gold plunder off dead Arabs' dress, and never have a pang of conscience with it ; she would dance all night long, when she had a chance, like a little Bacchante ; she would shoot a man, if need be, with all the nonchalance in the world. She had had a thousand lovers, from handsome Marquises of the Guides to tawny black-browed scoundrels in the Zouaves, and she had never loved anything, except the roll of the *pas de charge*, and the sight of her own arch defiant face, with its scarlet lips and its short jetty hair, when she saw it by chance in some burnished cuirass, that served her for a mirror. She was more like a handsome saucy boy than anything else under

the sun, and yet there was that in the pretty, impudent little Friend of the Flag that was feminine with it all—generous and graceful amidst all her boldness, and her licence, her revelries, and the unsettled life she led in the barracks and the camps, under the shadow of the eagles.

Away she went, now singing—

“ Mais je ris en sage,
Bon !
La farira dondaine,
Gai !
La farira dondée ! ”

down the crooked windings, and over the ruined gardens of the old Moorish quarter of the Cashbah, the hilts of the tiny pistols glancing in the sun, and the fierce fire of the burning sunlight pouring down unheeded on the brave bright hawk eyes that had never, since they first opened to the world, drooped or dimmed for the rays of the sun, or the gaze of a lover, for the menace of death, or the presence of war.

Of course, she was a little Amazon ; of course, she was a little Guerilla ; of course, she did not know what a blush meant ; of course, her thoughts were as slang and as riotous as her mutinous mischief was in its act : but she was “ *bon soldat*,” as she was given to say, with a toss of her curly head, and she had some of the virtues of soldiers. Soldiers had been about her ever since she first remembered having a wooden casserole for a cradle, and sucking down

red wine through a pipe-stem. Soldiers had been her books, her teachers, her models, her guardians, and, later on, her lovers, all the days of her life. She had had no guiding-star except the eagles on the standards; she had had no cradle-song except the rataplan and the réveillé; she had had no sense of duty taught her, except to face fire boldly, never to betray a comrade, and to worship but two deities, "La Gloire" and "La France."

Yet there were tales told in the barrack-yards and under canvas of the little Amie du Drapeau, that had a gentler side. Of how softly she would touch the wounded; of how deftly she would cure them. Of how carelessly she would dash through under a raking fire, to take a draught of water to a dying man. Of how she had sat by an old Grenadier's death-couch, to sing to him, refusing to stir, though it was a fête at Châlons, and she loved fêtes as only a French girl can. Of how she had ridden twenty leagues on a saddleless Arab horse, to fetch the surgeon of the Spahis to a Bedouin perishing in the desert of shot wounds. Of how she had sent every sou of her money to her mother, so long as that mother lived—a brutal, drunk, vile-tongued old woman, who had beaten her oftentimes, as the sole maternal attention, when she was but an infant. These things were told of Cigarette, and with a perfect truth. She was "*mauvais sujet, mais bon soldat*," as she classified herself. Her own sex would have seen no good in her; but her comrades-at-arms could, and did. Of

a surety, she missed virtues that women prize ; but, not less of a surety, had she caught some that they miss.

Singing her refrain, on she dashed now, swift as a greyhound, light as a hare, glancing here and glancing there as she bounded over the picturesque desolation of the Cashbah. It was just noon, and there were few could brave the noon-heat as she did. It was very still ; there was only from a little distance the roll of the French kettle-drums where the drummers of the African regiments were practising. "Holà ! le v'la !" cried Cigarette to herself, as her falcon-eyes darted right and left ; and, like a chamois, she leaped down over the great masses of Turkish ruins, cleared the channel of a dry water-course, and alighted just in front of a Chasseur d'Afrique, who was sitting alone on a broken fragment of white marble, relic of some Moorish mosque, whose delicate columns, crowned with wind-sown grasses, rose behind him, against the deep intense blue of the cloudless sky.

He was sitting thoughtfully enough, almost wearily, tracing figures in the dry sand of the soil with the point of his scabbard ; yet he had all the look about him of a brilliant French soldier, of one who, moreover, had seen hot and stern service. He was bronzed, but scarcely looked so after the red, brown, and black of the Zouaves and the Turco, for his skin was naturally very fair, the features delicate, the eyes very soft—for which Monsieur Tata had growled contemptuously, "a woman's face"—a long, silken chesnut beard swept over his chest ; and his figure,

as he leaned there in the blue and scarlet and gold of the Chasseurs' uniform, with his spurred heel thrust into the sand, and his arm resting on his knee, was, as Cigarette's critical eye told her, the figure of a superb cavalry rider, light, supple, long of limb, wide of chest, with every sinew and nerve firm-knit as links of steel. She glanced at his hands, which were very white, despite the sun of Algiers, and the labours that fall to a private of Chasseurs.

"*Beau lion!*" she thought, "and noble, whatever he is."

But the best of blood was not new to her in the ranks of the Algerian regiments; she had known so many of them—those gilded butterflies of the *Chaussée d'Antin*, those lordly spendthrifts of the *vieille roche*, who had served in the battalions of the *demie-cavalerie*, or the squadrons of the French Horse, to be thrust nameless and unhonoured into a sand-hole hastily dug with the bayonets in the hot hush of an African night.

She woke him unceremoniously from his reverie, with a challenge to wine.

"Ah-ha, mon Roumi!" Tata Leroux says you are English; by the faith, he must be right, or you would never set musing there like an owl in the sunlight! Take a draught of my burgundy; bright as rubies. I never sell bad wines;—not I!—I know better than to drink them myself."

He started and rose; and, before he took the *bidon*,†

* Soldier.

† Little wooden drinking-cup.

bowed to her, raising his cap with a grave courteous obeisance; a bow that had used to be noted in throne-rooms for its perfection of grace.

"Ah, ma belle, is it you?" he said, wearily. "You do me much honour."

Cigarette gave a little petulant twist to the tap of her wine-barrel. She was not used to that style of salutation. She half liked it, half resented it. It made her wish, with an impatient scorn for the wish, that she knew how to read, and had not her hair cut short like a boy's—a weakness the little vivandière had never been visited with before.

"Morbleu!" she said, pettishly. "You are too fine for us, *mon brave*. In what country, I should wonder, does one learn such dainty ceremony as that?"

"Where should one learn courtesies if not in France?" he answered, wearily. He had danced with this girl-soldier the night before at a *guinguette* ball, seeing her for the first time, for it was almost the first time he had been in the city since the night when he had thrown the dice, and lost two Napoléons and the Bedouins to Claude de Chanrellon; but his thoughts were far from her in this moment.

"Ouf! you have learnt carte and tierce with your tongue!" cried Cigarette, provoked to receive no more compliment than that. From generals and staff-officers as from drummers and trumpeters she was accustomed to flattery and wooing, luscious as sugared chocolate, and ardent as flirtation, with a barrack

flavour about it, commonly is; she would, as often as not, to be sure, finish it with the butt-end of her pistol, or the butt-end of some bit of stinging sarcasm, but still for all that she liked it, and resented its omission. "They say you are English, but I don't believe it; you speak too soft, and you sound the double *La* too well. A Spaniard, eh?"

"Do you find me so devout a Catholic that you think so?"

She laughed. "A Greek, then?"

"Still worse. Have you seen me cheat at cards?"

"An Austrian? You waltz like a White-Coat?"

He shook his head.

She stamped her little foot into the ground—a foot fit for a model, with its shapely military boot; spurred, too, for Cigarette rode like a circus-rider.

"*Bécasse!* say what you are, then, at once."

"A soldier of France. Can you wish me more?"

For the first time her eyes flashed and softened—her one love was the tricolour.

"True!" she said, simply. "But you were not always a soldier of France? You joined, they say, twelve years ago? What were you before then?"

She here cast herself down in front of him, and, with her elbows on the sand, and her chin on her hands, watched him with all the frank curiosity and unmoved nonchalance imaginable, as she launched the question point-blank.

"Before!" he said, slowly. "Well—a fool."

"You belonged to the majority, then!" said

Cigarette, with a piquance made a thousand times more piquant by the camp slang she spoke in. "You should not have had to come into the ranks, *mon ami*; majorities—specially that majority—have very smooth sailing generally!"

He looked at her more closely, though she wearied him.

"Where have you got your ironies, Cigarette? You are so young."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Bah! one is never young, and always young in camps. Young? *Pardieu*! When I was four, I could swear like a grenadier, plunder like a *préfet*, lie like a priest, and drink like a bohemian."

Yet—with all that—and it was the truth, the brow was so open under the close rings of the curls, the skin so clear under the sun-tan, the mouth so rich and so arch in its youth!

"Why did you come into the service?" she went on, before he had a chance to answer her. "You were born in the Noblesse—bah! I know an aristocrat at a glance! *Ceux qui ont pris la peine de naître*!—don't you like *Figaro*? My Spahis played it last winter, and I was *Figaro* myself. Now many of those aristocrats come; shoals of them, but it is always for something. They all come for something; most of them have been ruined by the *lionnes*, a hundred million of francs gone in a quarter! Ah-bah! what blind bats the best of you are! They have gambled, or bet, or got into hot water, or fought too many duels, or caused a court scandal, or some-

thing; all the aristocrats that come to Africa are ruined. What ruined you, Monsieur l'Aristocrat?"

"Aristocrat? I am none. I am a Corporal of the Chasseurs."

"Diable! I have known a Duke a Corporal! What ruined you?"

"What ruins most men, I imagine—folly."

"Folly sure enough!" retorted Cigarette, with scornful acquiescence. She had no patience with him. He danced so deliciously, he looked so superb, and he would give her nothing but these absent answers. "Wisdom don't bring men who look as you look into the ranks of the volunteers for Africa. Besides, you are too handsome to be a sage!"

He laughed a little.

"I never was one, that's certain. And you are too pretty to be a cynic."

"A what?" she did not know the word. "Is that a good cigar you have? Give me one. Do women smoke in your old country?"

"Oh yes—many of them."

"Where is it, then?"

"I have no country—now."

"But the one you had?"

"I have forgotten I ever had one."

"Did it treat you ill, then?"

"Not at all."

"Had you anything you cared for in it?"

"Well—yes."

"What was it? A woman?"

"No—a horse."

He stooped his head a little as he said it, and traced more figures slowly in the sand.

"Ah!"

She drew a short, quick breath. She understood that; she would only have laughed at him had it been a woman: Cigarette was more veracious than complimentary in her estimate of her own sex.

"There was a man in the Guides I knew," she went on softly, "loved a horse like that;—he would have died for Cossack;—but he was a terrible gambler, terrible. Not but what I like play myself. Well, one day he played and played till he was mad, and everything was gone; and then in his rage he staked the only thing he had left. Staked and lost the horse! He never said a word; but he just slipped a pistol in his pocket, went to the stable, kissed Cossack once—twice—thrice—and shot himself through the heart."

"Poor fellow!" murmured the Chasseur d'Afrique, in his chesnut beard.

Cigarette was watching him with all the keenness of her falcon eyes; "he has gambled away a good deal too," she thought. "It is always the same old story with them."

"Your cigars are good, *mon lion*," she said, impatiently, as she sprang up, her lithe elastic figure in the bright vivandière uniform standing out in full relief against the pearly grey of the ruined pillars, the vivid green of the rank vegetation, and the in-

tense light of the noon. "Your cigars are good, but it is more than your company is! *Ma cantche!* If you had been as dull as this last night I would not have danced a single turn with you in the cancan!"

And with a bound to which indignation lent wings like a swallow's, the Friend of the Flag, insulted and amazed at the apathy with which her advances to friendship had been received, dashed off at her topmost speed, singing all the louder out of bravado. "To have nothing more to say to me after dancing with me all night!" thought Cigarette, with fierce wrath at such contumely, the first neglect the pet of the Spahis had ever experienced.

She was incensed, too, that she had been degraded into that momentary wish that she knew how to read, and looked less like a boy—just because a Chasseur with white hands and silent ways had made her a grave bow! She was more incensed still because she could not get at his history, and felt, despite herself, a reluctance to bribe him for it with those cajoleries whose potency she had boasted to Tata Leroux. "*Gare à lui!*" muttered the soldier-coquette passionately, in her little white teeth, so small and so pearly, though they had gripped a bridle tight before then, when each hand was filled with a pistol. "*Gare à lui!* If he offend *me* there are five hundred swords that will thrust civility into him, five hundred shots that will teach him the cost of daring to provoke Cigarette!"

En route through the town her wayward way took

the pretty brunette Friend of the Flag as many devious meanderings as a bird takes in a summer's-day flight when it stops here for a berry, there for a grass-seed, here to dip its beak into cherries, there to dart after a dragon-fly, here to shake its wings in a brook, there to poise on a lily-bell.

She loitered in a thousand places, for Cigarette knew everybody; she chattered with a group of Turcos, she emptied her barrel for some Zouaves, she ate sweetmeats with a lot of negro boys, she boxed a little drummer's ear for slurring over the "r'lin tintin" at his practice, she drank a demi-tasse with some officers at a café, she had ten minutes' pistol-shooting, where she beat hollow a young dandy of the Guides who had come to look at Algiers for a week, and made even points with one of the first shots of the "*Cavalerie à pied*," as the Algerian antithesis runs. Finally she paused before the open French window of a snow-white villa, half-buried in tamarisk and orange and pomegranate, with the deep-hued flowers glaring in the sun, and a hedge of wild cactus fencing it in; through the cactus she made her way as easily as a rabbit burrows; it would have been an impossibility to Cigarette to enter by any ordinary means; and balancing herself lightly on the sill for a second, stood looking in at the chamber.

"Ho, M. le Marquis! the Zouaves have drunk all my wine up; fill me my keg with yours for once—the very best burgundy, mind. I'm half afraid your cellar will hurt my reputation."

The chamber was very handsome, hung and furnished in the very best Paris fashion, and all glittering with amber and ormolu and velvets; in it half a dozen men—officers of the cavalry—were sitting over their noon breakfast, and playing a lansquenet at the same time. The table was crowded with dishes of every sort, and wines of every vintage, and the fragrance of their bouquet, the clouds of smoke, and the heavy scent of the orange-blossoms without, mingled together in an intense perfume. He whom she addressed, M. le Marquis de Châteauroy, laughed, and looked up.

"Ah, is it thee, my pretty brunette? Take what thou wantest out of the ice-pails."

"*Premier cru?*" asked Cigarette, with the dubious air and caution of a connoisseur.

"Comet!" said M. le Marquis, amused with the precautions taken with his cellar, one of the finest in Algiers. "Come in and have some breakfast, *ma belle*. Only pay the toll."

Where he sat between the window and the table he caught her in his arms and drew her pretty face down; Cigarette, with the laugh of a saucy child, whisked her cigar out of her mouth, and blew a great cloud of smoke in his eyes. She had no particular fancy for him, though she had for his wines. Shouts of mirth from the other men completed the Marquis's discomfiture, as she swayed away from him, and went over to the other side of the table, emptying some

bottles unceremoniously into her wine-keg; iced, ruby, perfumy claret that she could not have bought anywhere for the barracks.

"Holà!" cried the Marquis. "Thou art not generally so coy with thy kisses, *petite*."

Cigarette tossed her head.

"I don't like bad clarets after good! I've just been with your Corporal, '*Bel-à-faire-peur*;' you are no beauty after him, M. le Colonel."

Châteauroy's face darkened. He was a colossal-limbed man, whose bone was iron, and whose muscles were like oak-fibres; he had a dark keen head like an eagle's, the brow narrow but very high, looking higher because the close-cut hair was worn off the temples; thin lips hidden by heavy curling moustaches, and a skin burnt black by long African service. Still he was fairly handsome enough not to have muttered so heavy an oath as he did at the *vivandière*'s jest.

"*Sacre-bleu*! I wish my Corporal were shot! one can never hear the last of him."

Cigarette darted a quick glance at him. "Oh ho, jealous, *mon brave*!" thought her quick wits. "And why, I wonder?"

"You haven't a finer soldier in your *Chasseurs*, *mon cher*; don't wish him shot for the good of the service," said the Viscount de Chanrellon, who had now a command of his own in the Light Cavalry of Algiers. "*Pardieu*! if I had to choose whether I'd be backed by '*Bel-à-faire-peur*,' or by six other

men in a skirmish, I'd choose him and risk the odds."

Châteauroy tossed off his burgundy with a contemptuous impatience.

"Diable! That is the *galamatias* one always hears about this fellow—as if he were a second Roland, or a revived Bayard! I see nothing particular in him, except that he's too fine a gentleman for the ranks."

"Fine? Ah!" laughed Cigarette. "He made me a bow this morning like a court chamberlain—and his beard is like carded silk—and he has such woman's hands, *mon Dieu!* But he is a *croc-mitaine* too."

"Rather!" laughed Claude de Chanrellon, as magnificent a soldier himself as ever crossed swords. "I said he would eat fire the very minute he played that queer game at dice with me years ago. I wish I had him instead of you, Châteauroy. Like lightning in a charge, and yet the very man for a dangerous bit of secret service that wants the softness of a panther. We all let our tongues go too much, but he says so little—just a word here, a word there,—when one's wanted—no more; and he's the devil's own to fight."

The Marquis heard the praise of his Corporal, knitting his heavy brows. It was evident the private was no favourite with him.

"The fellow rides well enough," he said, with an affectation of carelessness; "there—for what I see—is the end of his marvels. I wish you had him, Claude, with all my soul."

"Oh-hè!" cried Chanrellon, wiping the Rhenish off his tawny moustaches, "he should have been a captain by this, if I had. Morbleu! he is a splendid sabreur—kills as many men to his own sword as I could myself, when it comes to a hand in hand fight; breaks horses in like magic; rides them like the wind, has a hawk's eye over open country; obeys like clock-work; what more can you want?"

"Obeys! yes," said the Colonel of Chasseurs, with a snarl. "He'd obey without a word, if you ordered him to walk up to a cannon's mouth and be blown from it; but he gives you such a d——d languid *grand seigneur* glance as he listens that one would think he commanded the regiment."

"But he's very popular with your men, too?"

"Monsieur, the worst quality a Corporal can have. His idea of maintaining discipline is to treat them to cognac, and give them tobacco."

"Pardieu! not a bad way either with our French fire-eaters. *Il connaît son monde; ce brave.* Your squadrons would go to the devil after him."

The Colonel gave a grim laugh.

"I dare say nobody knows the way better."

Cigarette, flirting with the other officers, drinking champagne by great glassfuls, eating bonbons from one, sipping another's soup, pulling the limbs of a succulent ortolan to pieces with a relish, and devouring truffles with all the zest of a bon-vivant, did not lose a word, and catching the inflection of Châteauroy's voice, settled with her own thoughts that "Bel-à-faire-

peur" had not a fair field or a smooth course with his Colonel. The weathercock heart of the little "Friend of the Flag" veered round, with her sex's common custom, to the side that was the weakest.

"Dieu de Dieu, M. le Colonel!" she cried, while she ate M. le Colonel's *foie gras* with as little ceremony and as much enjoyment as would be expected from a young plunderer accustomed to think a meal all the better spiced by being stolen "by the rules of war,"—"whatever else your handsome Corporal is, he is an aristocrat. Ah, ah, I know the aristocrats—I do! Their touch is so gentle, and their speech is so soft, and they have no slang of the camp, and yet they are such *diablotins* to fight and eat steel, and die laughing all so quiet and nonchalant. Give me the aristocrats—the real thing, you know. Not the ginger cakes, just gilt, that are ashamed of being honest bread—but the old blood like *Bel-à-faire-peur*."

The Colonel laughed, but restlessly; the little ingrate had aimed at a sore point in him. He was of the First Empire Nobility, and he was weak enough, though a fierce, dauntless, iron-nerved soldier, to be discontented with the great fact that his father had been a hero of the Army of Italy and scarce inferior in genius to Massena, because impatient of the minor one that, before strapping on a knapsack to have his first taste of war under Custine, the Marshal had been but a postilion at a posting inn in the heart of the Nivernais.

"Ah, my brunette!" he answered, with a rough

laugh, have you taken my popular Corporal for your lover? You should give your old friends warning first, or he may chance to get an ugly spit on a sabre."

The Amie du Drapeau tossed off her sixth glass of champagne. She felt for the first time in her life a flush of hot blood on her brown clear cheek, well used as she was to such jests and such lovers as these.

"Ma foi!" she said, coolly. "He would be more likely to spit than be spitted if it came to a duel. I should like to see him in a duel; there is not a prettier sight in the world when both men have science. As for fighting for me! Morbleu! I will thank nobody to have the impudence to do it, unless I order them out. Coqueline got shot for me, you remember;—he was a pretty fellow, Coqueline, and they killed him so clumsily, that they disfigured him terribly—it was quite a pity. I said then I would have no more handsome men fight about me. *You may, if you like, M. le Faucon Noir.*"

Which title she gave with a saucy laugh, hitting with a chocolate bonbon the black African-burnt visage of the omnipotent chief she had the audacity to attack. High or low, they were all the same to Cigarette. She would have "slanged" the Emperor himself with the self-same coolness, and the Army had given her a passport of immunity so wide, that it would have fared ill with any one who had ever attempted to bring the vivandière to book for her uttermost mischief.

"By the way!" she went on, quick as thought,

with her reckless devil-may-care gaiety. "One thing!—Your Corporal will demoralise the Army of Africa, m'sieu?"

"Eh? He shall have an ounce of cold lead before he does. What in?"

"He will demoralise it," said Cigarette, with a sagacious shake of her head. "If they follow his example, we shan't have a Chasseur, or a Spahis, or a Piou-piou, or a Sapeur worth anything——"

"Sacré! What does he do?" The Colonel's strong teeth bit savagely through his cigar; he would have given much to have been able to find a single thing of insubordination or laxity of duty in a soldier who irritated and annoyed him, but who obeyed him implicitly, and was one of the most brilliant "fire-eaters" of his regiment.

"He won't only demoralise the Army," pursued Cigarette, with vivacious eloquence, "but if his example is followed, he'll ruin the Préfets, close the Bureaux, destroy the Exchequer, beggar all the officials, make African life as tame as milk-and-water, and rob *you*, M. le Colonel, of your very highest and dearest privilege!"

"Sacre-bleu!" cried her hearers, as their hands instinctively sought their swords, "what does he do?"

Cigarette looked at them out of her arch black lashes.

"Why, *he never thieves from the Arabs!* If the fashion come in, adieu to our occupation. Court-martial him, Colonel!"

With which sally Cigarette thrust her curls back off her temples, and launched herself into lansquenet with all the ardour of a gambler and the vivacity of a child, her eyes flashing, her cheeks flushing, her little teeth set, her whole soul in the whirl of the game, made all the more riotous by the peels of laughter from her comrades, and the wines that were washed down like water. Cigarette was a terrible little gamester, and had gaming made very easy to her, for it was the creed of the Army that her losses never counted, but her gains were paid to her often double or treble. Indeed, so well did she play, and so well did the Goddess of Hazard favour her, that she might have grown a millionaire on the fruits of her dice and her cards, but for this fact, that whatever the little Friend of the Flag had in her hands one hour, was given away the next, to the first wounded soldier, or ailing veteran, or needy Arab woman that required the charity.

As much gold was showered on her as on Isabel of the Jockey Club ; but Cigarette was never the richer for it. "Bah !" she would say, when they told her of her heedlessness, "money is like a mill, no good standing still. Let it turn, turn, turn, as fast as ever it can, and the more bread will come from it for the people to eat."

The vivandière was by instinct a fine political economist.

Meanwhile, where she had left him among the stones of the ruined mosque, the Chasseur, whom they nick-

named *Bel-à-faire-peur*, in a double sense, because of his "woman's face," as *Tata Leroux* termed it, and because of the terror his sword had become through North Africa, sat motionless with his right arm resting on his knee, and his spurred heel thrust into the sand, the sun shining down unheeded in its fierce burning glare on the chesnut masses of his beard, and the bright glitter of his uniform.

He was a dashing cavalry soldier, who had had a dozen wounds cut over his body by the *Bedouin* swords, in many and hot skirmishes; who had waited through sultry African nights for the lion's tread, and had fought the desert-king and conquered; who had ridden a thousand miles over the great sand waste, and the boundless arid plains, and slept under the stars with the saddle beneath his head, and his rifle in his hand, all through the night; who had served, and served well, in fierce, arduous, unremitting work, in trying campaigns and in close discipline; who had blent the *verve*, the brilliance, the daring, the eat-drink-and-enjoy-for-to-morrow-we-die of the French *Chasseur*, with something that was very different, and much more tranquil.

Yet, though as bold a man as any enrolled in the French Service, he sat alone here in the shadow of the column, thoughtful, motionless, lost in silence.

In his left hand was a *Galignani* six months old, and his eyes rested on a line in the obituary:

"On the 10th ult., at Royallieu, suddenly, the Right Hon. Denzil, Viscount Royallieu; aged 90."

CHAPTER II.

CIGARETTE EN BACCHANTE.

VANITAS vanitatum! The dust of death lies over the fallen altars of Bubastis, where once all Egypt came down the flood of glowing Nile, and Herodotus mused under the shadowy foliage, looking on the lake-like rings of water. The Temple of the Sun, where the beauty of Asenath beguiled the Israelite to forget his sale into bondage and banishment, lies in shapeless hillocks, over which canter the mules of dragomen, and chatter the tongues of tourists. Where the Lutetian Palace of Julian saw the Legions rush, with torches and with wine-bowls, to salute their darling as Augustus, the sledge-hammer and the stucco of the Haussmann fiat bear desolation in their wake. Levantine dice are rattled, where Hypatia's voice was heard. Bills of exchange are trafficked in, where Cleopatra wandered under the palm aisles of her rose gardens. Drummers roll their

caserne-calls, where Drusus fell and Sulla laid down dominion.

And here—in the land of Hannibal, in 'the conquest of Scipio, in the Phœnicia, whose loveliness used to flash in the burning, sea-mirrored sun, while her fleets went eastward and westward for the honey of Athens and the gold of Spain—here Cigarette danced the Cancan!

An *auberge* of the *barrière* swung its sign of the *As de Pique*, where feathery palms once had waved above mosques of snowy gleam, with marble domes and jewelled arabesques, and the hush of prayer under columned aisles. "*Débûts de vin, liqueurs, et tabac*," was written, where once verses of the Koran had been blazoned by reverent hands along porphyry cornices and capitals of jasper. A *Café Chantant* reared its impudent little roof, where once, far back in the dead cycles, Phœnician warriors had watched the galleys of the gold-haired favourite of the gods bear down to smite her against whom the one unpardonable sin of rivalry to Rome was quoted.

The riot of a Paris *guinguette* was heard, where once the tent of Belisarius might have been spread above the majestic head that towered in youth above the tempestuous seas of Gothic armies, as when, silvered with age, it rose as a rock against the on-sweeping flood of Bulgarian hordes. The *grisette* charms of little tobacconists, milliners, flower-girls, lemonade-sellers, bonbon sellers, and *filles de joie* flaunted themselves in the gas-light, where the lus-

trous sorceress eyes of Antonina might have glanced over the Afric Sea, while her wanton's heart, so strangely filled with leonine courage and shameless licence, heroism and brutality, cruelty and self-devotion, swelled under the purples of her delicate vest, at the glory of the man she at once dishonoured and adored.

Vanitas vanitatum ! Under the thirsty soil, under the ill-paved streets, under the arid turf, the Legions lay dead, with the Carthaginians they had borne down under the mighty pressure of their phalanx ; and the Byzantine ranks were dust side by side with the soldiers of Gelimer. And here, above the graves of two thousand centuries, the little light feet of Cigarette danced joyously in that triumph of the Living, who never remember that they also are dancing onward to the tomb !

It was a low-roofed, white-plastered, gaudily-decked, smoke-dried mimicry of the guinguettes beyond Paris. The long room, that was an imitation of the Salle de Mars on a Lilliputian scale, had some bunches of lights flaring here and there, and had its walls adorned with laurel-wreaths, stripes of tricoloured paint, vividly coloured medallions of the Second Empire, and a little pink gauze flourished about it, that flashed into brightness under the jets of flame—trumpery, yet trumpery, which, thanks to the instinct of the French esprit, harmonised, and did not vulgarise ; a gift French instinct alone possesses. The floor was bare and well polished ; the air full of

tobacco-smoke, wine fumes, brandy odours, and an overpowering scent of oil, garlic, and *pot au feu*. Riotous music pealed through it, that even in its clamour kept a certain silvery ring, a certain rhythmical cadence. Pipes were smoked, barrack slang, camp slang, *barrière* slang, temple slang, were chattered volubly. Theresa's songs were sung by bright-eyed, sallow-cheeked Parisiennes, and chorused by the lusty lungs of Zouaves and Turcos. Good humour prevailed, though of a wild sort; the mad gallop of the Rigolboche had just flown round the room, like lightning, to the crash and the tumult of the most headlong music that ever set spurred heels stamping and grisettes' heels flying: and now, where the crowds of soldiers and women stood back to leave her a clear place, Cigarette was dancing alone.

She had danced the cancan; she had danced since sunset; she had danced till she had tired out cavalrymen, who could go days and nights in the saddle without a sense of fatigue, and made Spahis cry quarter, who never gave it by any chance in the battle-field; and she was dancing now like a little Bacchante, as fresh as if she had just sprung up from a long summer day's rest. Dancing as she would dance only now and then, when caprice took her, and her wayward vivacity was at its height, on the green space before a tent full of general officers, on the bare floor of a barrack-room, under the canvas of a fête-day's booth, or as here, in the *salle* of a *café*.

Marshals had more than once essayed to bribe

the famous little Friend of the Flag to dance for them, and had failed : but, for a set of soldiers, war-worn, dust-covered, weary with toil and stiff with wounds, she would do it, till they forgot their ills, and got as intoxicated with it as with champagne. For her *gros bébés*, if they were really in want of it, she would do anything. She would flout a star-covered General, box the ears of a brilliant Aide, send killing missiles of slang at a dandy of a regiment de famille, and refuse point-blank a Russian Grand Duke ; but to "*mes enfans*," as she was given to calling the rough tigers and grisly veterans of the Army of Africa, Cigarette was never capricious, however mischievously she would rally, or contemptuously would rate them, when they deserved it.

And she was dancing for them now.

Her soft short curls all fluttering, her cheeks all bright with a scarlet flush, her eyes as black as night and full of fire, her gay little uniform, with its scarlet and purple, making her look like a fuchsia bell tossed by the wind to and fro, ever so lightly, on its delicate swaying stem, Cigarette danced with the wild grace of an Almeh, of a Bayadère, of a Nautch girl, as untutored and instinctive in her as its song to a bird, as its swiftness to a chamois. To see Cigarette was like drinking light fiery wines, whose intoxication was gay as mischief, and sparkling as themselves. All the warmth of Africa, all the wit of France, all the bohemianism of the Flag, all the caprices of her sex, were in that bewitching dancing. Flashing, flutter-

ing, circling, whirling, glancing like a sabre's gleam, tossing like a flower's head, bounding like an antelope, launching like an arrow, darting like a falcon, skinning like a swallow; then for an instant resting as indolently, as languidly, as voluptuously, as a water-lily rests on the water's breast;—*Cigarette en Bacchante* no man could resist.

When once she abandoned herself to the afflatus of that dance-delirium, she did with her beholders what she would. The famous Cachucha, that made the reverend Cardinals of Spain fling off their pontifical vestments, and surrender themselves to the witchery of the castanets and the gleam of the white twinkling feet, was never more irresistible, more enchanting, more full of wild, soft, bizarre, delicious grace. It was a poem of motion and colour, an ode to Venus and Bacchus.

All her heart was in it—that heart of a girl and a soldier, of a hawk and a kitten, of a bohemian and an epicurean, of a lascar and a child, which beat so brightly and so boldly under the dainty gold aiglettes with which she laced her dashing little uniform.

In the Chambrée of Zéphyr, among the Douars of Spahis, on sandy soil under African stars, above the heaped plunder brought in from a razzia, in the yellow light of candles fastened to bayonets stuck in the earth at a bivouac, on the broad deal table of a barrack-room full of black-browed *conscripts indigènes*, amidst the thundering echoes of the Marseillaise des Bataillons, shouted from the brawny chests of Zouaves,

Cigarette had danced, danced, danced, till her whole vivacious life seemed pressed into one hour, and all the mirth and mischief of her little brigand's soul seemed to have found their utterance in those tiny, slender, spurred, and restless feet, that never looked to touch the earth which they lit on lightly as a bird alights, only to leave it afresh, with wider swifter bound, with ceaseless airy flight.

So she danced now, in the cabaret of the As de Pique. She had a famous group of spectators, not one of whom knew how to hold himself back from springing in to seize her in his arms, and whirl with her down the floor. But it had been often told them by experience, that, unless she beckoned one out, a blow of her clenched hand and a cessation of her impromptu *pas de seul*, would be the immediate result. Her spectators were renowned *croque-mitaines*; men whose names rang like trumpets in the ear of Kabyle and Marabout; men who had fought under the noble colours of the day of Mazagran, or had cherished or emulated its traditions; men who had the salient features of all the varied species that make up the soldiers of Africa.

There was Ben Arslan, with his crimson burnous wrapped round his towering stature, from whom Moor and Jew fled as before a pestilence, the fiercest, deadliest, most voluptuous of all the Spahis; brutalised in his drink, merciless in his loves; all an Arab when once back in the desert, with a blow of a scabbard his only payment for forage, and a thrust

of his sabre his only apology to husbands, but to the Service a slave, and in the combat a lion.

There was Beau-Bruno, a dandy of Turcos, whose snowy turban and olive beauty bewitched half the women of Algeria, who 'himself affected to neglect his conquests, with a supreme contempt for those indulgences, but who would have been led out and shot rather than forego the personal adornings, for which his adjutant and his *capitaine du bureau* growled unceasing wrath at him with every day that shone.

There was Pouffer-de-Rire, a little Tringlo,* the wittiest, gayest, happiest, sunniest-tempered droll in all the army, who would sing the camp-songs so joyously through a burning march, that the whole of the battalions would break into one refrain as with one throat, and press on laughing, shouting, running, heedless of thirst, or heat, or famine, and as full of monkey-like jests as any gamins.

There was En-ta-maboull,† so nicknamed from his love for that uncereemonious slang phrase—a Zouave who had the history of a Gil Blas, and the talent of a Crichton, the morals of an Abruzzi brigand, and the wit of a Falstaff; aquiline-nosed, eagle-eyed, black-skinned as an African, with adventures enough in his life to outvie Munchausen, with a purse always *pleine de vide*,‡ as the camp sentence runs; who thrust his men through the body as coolly as others

* Soldier of the commissariat and of the baggage-trains.

† Est-ce-que-tu es fou? in ordinary French.

‡ Penniless.

kill wasps; who roasted a shepherd over the camp-fire for contumacy in concealing Bedouin whereabouts; yet who would pawn his last shirt at the bazaar to help a comrade in debt, and had once substituted himself for, and received fifty blows on the loins in the stead of, his sworn friend, whom he loved with that love of David for Jonathan, which, in Caserne life, is readier found than in Club life.

There was Pattes-du-Tigre, a small wiry supple-limbed fire-eater, with a skin like a coal and eyes that sparkled like the live coal's flame, a veteran of the Joyeux, who could discipline his roughs as a sheep-dog his lambs, and who had one curt martial law for his detachment, brief as Draco's, and trimmed to suit either an attack on the enemy or the chastisement of an *indiscipliné*, lying in one simple word—"Fusillez."

There was Barbe-Grise, a grisly *ancien* of Zéphyrs, who held the highest repute of any in his battalion for rushing on to a foe with a foot speed that could equal the canter of an Arab's horse; for having stood alone once the brunt of thirty Bedouins' attack, and ended by beating them back, though a dozen spear-heads were launched into his body, and his *pantalons garances* were filled with his own blood; and for framing a matchless system of night plunder that swept the country bare as a table-rock in an hour, and made the colons surrender every hidden treasure, from a pot of gold to a hen's eggs, from a caldron of couscoussou to a tom-cat.

There was Alcide Echaufourées, also a Zéphyr, who had his nickname from the marvellous changes of costume with which he would pursue his erratic expedition, and deceive the very Arabs themselves into believing him a born Mussulman; a very handsome fellow, the Lauzun of his battalion, the Brummel of his caserne; *coquette* with his képi on one side of his graceful head, and his moustaches soft as a lady's hair, whose paradise was a score of dangerous intrigues, and whose seventh heaven was a duel with an infuriated husband; incorrigibly lazy, but with the Italian laziness, as of the panther who sleeps in the sun, and with such episodes of romance, mischief, love, and devilry in his twenty-five years of existence as would leave behind them all the invention of Dumas, *père ou fils*.

All these and many more like them were the spectators of Cigarette's ballet, applauding with the wild hurrah of the desert, with the clashing of spurs, with the thunder of feet, with the demoniac shrieks of irrepressible adoration and delight.

And every now and then her bright eyes would flash over the ring of familiar faces, and glance from them with an impatient disappointment as she danced; her *gros bébés* were not enough for her. She wanted a Chasseur with white hands and a grave smile to be amongst them; and she shook back her curls, and flushed angrily as she noted his absence, and went on with the pirouettes, the circling flights, the wild resistless abandonment of her inspirations, till she was

like a little desert-hawk that is intoxicated with the scent of prey borne down upon the wind, and wheeling like a mad thing in the transparent æther and the hot sun-glow.

L'As de Pique was the especial estaminet of the *chasses-marais*. He was in the house; she knew it; had she not seen him drinking with some others, or rather paying for all but taking little himself, just as she entered? He was in the house, this mysterious Bel-à-faire-peur—and was not here to see her dance! Not here to see the darling of the Douars; the pride of every Chacal, Zéphyr, and Chasseur in Africa; the Amie du Drapeau who was adored by every one, from Chefs de Bataillons to *fantassins*, and toasted by every drinker, from Algiers to Oran, in the Champagne of Messieurs les Généraux as in the Cric of the Loustics round a camp-fire!

He was not there; he was leaning over the little wooden ledge of a narrow window in an inner room, from which, one by one, some Spahis and some troopers of his own *tribu*,* with whom he had just been drinking such burgundies and brandies as the place could give, had sloped away one by one under the irresistible attraction of the vivandière. An attraction, however, that had not seduced them till all the bottles were emptied, bottles more in number and higher in cost than were prudent in a Corporal who had but his pay, and that scant enough, to keep himself, and who had known what it was to find a roll of white bread

* Squadron.

and a cup of coffee a luxury beyond all reach, and to have to *faire la lessive** up to the last thing in his haversack to buy a toss of thin wine when he was dying of thirst, or a slice of melon when he was parching with African fever.

But prudence had at no time been his speciality, and the reckless life of Algeria was not one to teach it, with its frank brotherly fellowship that bound the soldiers of each battalion, or each squadron, so closely in a fraternity of which every member took as freely as he gave; its gay, careless *carpe diem* camp-philosophy, the unconscious philosophy of men who enjoyed heart and soul if they had a chance, because they knew they might be shot dead before another day broke; and its swift and vivid changes that made *tirailleurs* and troopers one hour rich as a king in loot, in wine, in dark-eyed captives at the sacking of a tribe, to be the next day famished, scorched, dragging their weary limbs, or urging their sinking horses through endless sand and burning heat, glad to sell a cartouche, if they dared so break regimental orders, or to rifle a henroost, if they came near one, to get a mouthful of food, changing everything in their haversack for a sup of dirty water, and driven to pay with the thrust of a sabre for a lock of wretched grass to keep their beasts alive through the sickliness of a sirocco.

All these taught no caution to any nature normally without it; and the chief thing that his regiment had loved, in him whom they named *Bel-à-faire-peur*, from

* Sell his whole effects.

the first day that he had bound his red waist-sash about his loins, and the officers of the bureau had looked over the new volunteer, murmuring admiringly in their teeth "*Ce gaillard ira loin !*" had been that all he had was given, free as the winds, to any who asked or needed.

The all was slender enough. Unless he live by the ingenuity of his own manufactures, or by thieving or intimidating the people of the country, a French soldier has but barren fare and a hard struggle with hunger and poverty; and it was the one murmur against him, when he was lowest in the ranks, that he would never follow the fashion, in wringing out by force or threat the possessions of the native population. The one reproach, that made his fellow-*lascars** impatient and suspicious of him, was that he refused any share in those rough arguments of blows and lunges with which they were accustomed to persuade every victim they came nigh to yield them up all such treasures of food, or drink, or riches, from sheep's liver and couscoussou, to Morocco carpets and skins of brandy and coins hid in the sand, that the Arabs might be so unhappy as to own in their reach. That the fattest pullet of the poorest Bedouin was as sacred to him as the banquet of his own Chef d'Escadron, let him be ever so famished after the longest day's march, was an eccentricity, and an insult to the usages of the corps, for which not even his daring and his popularity could wholly procure him pardon.

But this defect in him was counterbalanced by the

* Soldiers.

lavishness with which his *décompte** was lent, given, or spent in the very moment of its receipt. If a man of his *tribu* wanted anything, he knew that Bel-à-faire-peur would offer his last sou to aid him, or, if money were all gone, would sell the last trifle he possessed to the Riz-pain-sels,† to get enough to assist his comrade. It was a virtue which went far to vouch for all others in the view of his lawless, open-handed brethren of the Chambrée‡ and the Camp, and made them forgive him many moments, when the mood of silence and the habit of solitude, not uncommon with him, would otherwise have incensed a fraternity with whom "*tu fais suisse ! §*" is the deadliest charge, and the sentence of excommunication against any who dare to provoke it.

One of those moods was on him now.

He had had a drinking-bout with the men who had left him, and had laughed as gaily and as carelessly, if not as riotously, as any of them at the wild mirth, the unbridled licence, the amatory recitations, and the Bacchic odes in their lawless *sapir*, that had ushered the night in while his wines unlocked the tongues and flowed down the throats of the fierce Arab-Spahis and the French cavalry-men. But now he leant out of the pent-up casement, with his arms folded on the sill, and a short pipe in his teeth, thoughtful and solitary after the orgie, whose heavy fumes and clouds of smoke still hung heavily on the air within.

The window looked on a little, dull, close court-yard,

* Pay.

† Working-soldiers of the administration.

‡ Sleeping-room in a barrack.

§ You live alone, or apart.

where the yellow leaves of a withered gourd trailed drearily over the grey uneven stones. The clamour of the applause and the ring of the music from the dancing-hall echoed with a whirling din in his ear, and made, in sharper stranger contrast, the quiet of the narrow court with its strip of starry sky above its four high walls.

He leaned there musing and grave, hearing little of the noise about him ;—there was always noise of some sort in the clangour and tumult of barrack or bivouac life, and he had grown to heed it no more than he heeded the roar of desert beasts about him, when he slept in the desert or the hills ;—but, looking dreamily out at the little shadowy square, with the sear gourd leaves and the rough misshapen stones. His present and his future were neither much brighter than the gloomy walled-in den on which he gazed.

Twelve years before, when he had been ordered into the *champ de manœuvre* for the first time, to see of what mettle he was made, the instructor had watched him with amazed eyes, muttering to himself, “ *Tiens ! ce n'est pas un 'bleu' **—*ceci !* What a rider ! Dieu de Dieu ! he knows more than we can teach. He has served before now—served in some Emperor's picked guard ! ”

And when he had passed from the exercising-ground to the campaign, the Army had found in him one of the most splendid of its many splendid soldiers ; and in the *folios matricules* † there was no page of

* Raw recruit.

† Daily register of the troopers' conduct.

achievements, of exploits, of services, of dangers, that showed a more brilliant array of military deserts than his. Yet, for many years, he had been passed by unnoticed: he had now not even the cross on his chest, and he had only slowly and with infinite difficulty been promoted so far as he stood now—a Corporal in the Chasseurs d'Afrique—a step only just accorded him because wounds innumerable, and distinctions without number in countless skirmishes, had made it impossible to cast him wholly aside any longer.

The cause lay in the implacable enmity of one man—his Chief.

Far-sundered as they were by position, and rarely as they could come in actual contact, that merciless weight of animosity from the great man to his soldier had laid on the other like iron, and clogged him from all advancement. His thoughts were of it now. Only to-day, at an inspection, the accidentally-broken saddle-girth of a boy-conscript had furnished pretext for a furious reprimand, a volley of insolent opprobrium hurled at himself, under which he had had to sit mute in his saddle, with no other sign that he was human beneath the outrage than the blood that would, despite himself, flush the pale bronze of his forehead. His thoughts were on it now.

"There are many losses that are bitter enough," he mused, "but there is not one so bitter as the loss of the right to *resent*!"

A whirlwind of laughter, so loud that it drowned the music of the shrill violins and thundering drums,

echoed through the rooms and shook him from his reverie.

"They are *bons enfants*," he thought, with a half smile, as he listened; "they are more honest in their mirth as in their wrath, than we ever were in that old world of mine."

Amidst the shouts, the crash, the tumult, the gay ringing voice of Cigarette rose distinct. She had apparently paused in her dancing to exchange one of those passes of arms which were her speciality, in the Sabir that she, a child of the regiments of Africa, had known as her mother tongue.

"*Il fait suisse?*"* she cried, disdainfully. "*Paf! et tu as bu de sa gourde, chenapan?*"

The grumbled assent of the accused was inaudible.

"*Ingrat!*" pursued the scornful, triumphant voice of the vivandière; "you would *bazarder*† your mother's grave-clothes! You would eat your children, *en fricassée*! You would sell your father's bones for a draught of *tord-boyaud*!‡ *Va t'en, chien!*"

The screams of mirth redoubled; Cigarette's style of withering eloquence was suited to all her auditors' tastes, and under the chorus of laughs at his cost, her infuriated adversary plucked up courage and roared forth a defiance.

"*Ma cantche!* white hands and a brunette's face are fine things for a soldier. He kills women, he

* You call him a misanthrope? and you have been drinking at his expense, you rascal?

† Pawn.

‡ Brandy.

kills women with his lady's grace! *Grand' chose ça!*"

"He does not pull their ears to make them give him their *style*,* and beat them with a *matraque*† if they don't fry his eggs fast enough, as you do, Barbe-Grise," retorted the contemptuous tones of the champion of the absent. "White hands, morbleu! Well, his hands are not always in other people's pockets as yours are, *sacripant!*"

This forcible *tu quoque* recrimination is in high relish in the Caserne; the screams of mirth redoubled; Barbe-Grise was a redoubtable authority whom the wildest dare-devil in his brigade dared not contradict, and he was getting the worst of it under the lash of Cigarette's tongue, to the infinite glee of the whole ball-room.

"Dam!—his hands cannot work as mine can!" growled her opponent.

"Oh, ho!" cried the little lady, with supreme disdain; "they don't twist cocks' throats and skin rabbits they have thieved, perhaps, like yours, but they would wring your neck before breakfast to get an appetite, if they could touch such *canaille*."

"*Canaille?*" thundered the insulted Barbe-Grise. "*Ma cantche!* if you were but a man!"

"What would you do to me, *brigand?*" screamed Cigarette, in fits of laughter; "give me fifty blows of *matraque*, as your officers gave you last week for stealing his *jambon*‡ from the *blanc-bee?*" §

* Money.

† Stick.

‡ Gun.

§ Newly-joined soldier.

A growl like a lion from the badgered Barbe-Grise shook the walls; she had cast her mischievous stroke at him on a very sore point, the unhappy young conscript's rifle having been first dexterously thieved from him, and then as dexterously sold to an Arab.

"Sacre-bleu!" he roared; "you are in love, *au grand galop*, with this *Vanqueur des belles*—this *loustic aristocrat*!"

The only answer to this unbearable insult was a louder tumult of laughter; a crash, a splash, and a volley of oaths from Barbe-Grise. Cigarette had launched a bottle of vin ordinaire at him, blinded his eyes, and drenched his beard with the red torrent and the shower of glass shivers, and was back again dancing like a little Bacchante, and singing at the top of her sweet lark-like voice—

"Turcos! Lignards!
 Bon Zigs! Truffards!
 Autour des couscoussou,
 Sont tous mes chers zou-zous!
 Roumis
 Spahis
 Même les Arbis,
 Joyeux
 Et Bleus,
 Même les Recrues,
 Ont pour moi
 Quand on boit
 L'air des rois
 L'air des rois!
 A mon cœur le chemin
 N'est qu' par le vin!
 Le bidon qu'on savoure
 Est le titre à m'amour!"

With which doggrel declaration of her own mercenary and cosmopolitan sentiments chanted in Sabir slang, the little Friend of the Flag resumed her wildest bounds and her most airy fantasias. At the sound of the animated altercation, not knowing but what one of his own troopers might be the delinquent, he who leaned out of the little casement moved forward to the doorway of the dancing-room; he did not guess that it was himself whom she had defended against the onslaught of the Zéphyr, Barbe-Grise.

His height rose far above the French soldiers, and above most even of the lofty-statured Spahis, and her rapid glance flashed over him at once. "Did he hear?" she wondered; the scarlet flush of exercise and excitement deepened on her clear brown cheek that had never blushed at the coarsest jests or the broadest love-words of the barrack-life that had been about her ever since her eyes first opened in their infancy to laugh at the sun-gleam on a Cuirassier's corslet among the baggage-waggons that her mother followed. She thought he had not heard; his face was grave, a little weary, and his gaze, as it fell on her, was abstracted.

"Oh hé! *beau Roumi!*" thought Cigarette, with a flush of hot wrath superseding her momentary and most rare embarrassment. "You are looking at me and not thinking of me? We will soon change that!"

Such an insult she had never been subjected to, from the first day when she had danced for sweet-meats on the top of a great drum when she was three

years old, in the middle of a circular camp of Tirailleurs. It sent fresh nerve into her lithe limbs, it made her eyes flash like so much fire, it gave her a million-fold more grace, more abandon, more heedlessness, more piqued and reckless *désinvolture*. She stamped her tiny spurred foot petulantly.

"Plus vite! Plus vite!" she cried, and as the musician obeyed her, she whirled, she spun, she bounded, she seemed to live in air, while her soft curls blew off her brow, and her white teeth glanced, and her cheeks glowed with a carmine glow, and the little gold aiglettes broke across her chest with the beating of her heart, that throbbed like a bird's heart when it is wild with the first breath of Spring.

She had pitted herself against him; and she won—so far.

The vivacity, the impetuosity, the antelope elegance, the voluptuous repose that now and then broke the ceaseless, sparkling movement of her dancing, caught his eyes and fixed them on her: it was bewitching, and it bewitched him for the moment; he watched her as in other days he had watched the fantastic witcheries of eastern almè, and the ballet charms of opera-dancers.

This young bohemian of the barrack danced in the dusky glare and the tavern fumes of the As de Pique to a set of soldiers in their shirt-sleeves with their short black pipes in their mouths, with as matchless a grace as ever the first *ballerina* of Europe danced before sovereigns and dukes on the boards of

Paris, Vienna, or London. It was the eastern *bamboula* of the Harems, to which was added all the elastic joyaunce, all the gay brilliancy, of the blood of France.

Suddenly she lifted both her hands above her head.

“*A moi, Roumis !*”

It was the signal well known, the signal of permission to join in that wild vertigo for which every one of her spectators was panting ; their pipes were flung away, their képis tossed off their heads, the music clashed louder and faster, and more fiery with every sound, the chorus of the *Marseillaise des Bataillons* thundered from a hundred voices—they danced as only men can dance who serve under the French flag, and live under the African sun. Two, only, still looked on ; the *Chasseur d’Afrique*, and a veteran of the 10th company, lamed for life at Mazagran.

“*En ta maboull ? Tu ne dances pas—toi ?*” muttered the veteran Zéphyr to his silent companion.

The *Chasseur* turned and smiled a little.

“I prefer a *bamboula* whose music is the cannon, *bon père.*”

“Bravo ! Yet she is pretty enough to tempt you ?”

“Yes ; too pretty to be unsexed by such a life.”

His thoughts went to a woman he had loved well, a young Arab, with eyes like the softness of dark waters, who had fallen to him once in a *razzia* as

his share of spoil, and for whom he had denied himself cards, or wine, or tobacco, or an hour at the Café, or anything that alleviated the privation and severity of his lot as "*simple soldat*," which he had been then, that she might have such few and slender comforts as he could give her from his miserable pay. She was dead. Her death had been the darkest passage in his life in Africa—but the flute-like music of her voice seemed to come on his ear now. This girl-soldier had little charm for him after the sweet silent tender grace of his lost Zelme.

He turned and touched on the shoulder a Chasseur who had paused a moment to get breath in the head-long whirl :

"Come, we are to be with the Djied by dawn !"

The trooper obeyed instantly ; they were ordered to visit and remain with a Bedouin camp some thirty miles away on the naked plateau ; a camp professedly submissive, but not so much so but that the Bureau deemed it well to profit themselves by the services of the Corporal, whose knowledge of Arabic, whose friendship with the tribes, and whose superior intelligence in all such missions rendered him peculiarly fitted for errands that required diplomacy and address as well as daring and fire.

He went thoughtfully out of the noisy reeking ball-room into the warm lustre of the Algerian night ; as he went, Cigarette, who had been nearer than he knew, flashed full in his eyes the fury of her own sparkling ones, while with a contemptuous laugh she

struck him across the lips with the cigar she hurled at him.

"Unsexed? Pouf! If you have a woman's face may I not have a man's soul? It is only a fair exchange. I am no kitten, *bon zig*; take care of my talons!"

The words were spoken with the fierceness of Africa; she had too much in her of the spirit of the Zéphyrus and the Chacals with whom her youth had been spent from her cradle up, not to be dangerous when roused; she was off at a bound, and in the midst of the mad whirl again, before he could attempt to soften or efface the words she had overheard, and the last thing he saw of her was in a cloud of Zouaves and Spahis with the wild tintamarre of the music shaking riotous echoes from the rafters.

But when he had passed out of sight, Cigarette shook herself free from the dancers with petulant impatience. She was not to be allured by flattery or drawn by entreaty back amongst them; she set her delicate pearly teeth tight, and vowed with a reckless contemptuous impetuous oath that she was tired, that she was sick of them, that she was no strolling player to caper for them with a tambourine; and with that declaration made her way out alone into the little open court under the stars, so cool, so still after the heat, and riot, and turbulence within.

There she dropped on a broad stone step, and leant her head on her hand.

"Unsexed! unsexed! What did he mean?" she

thought, while for the first time, with a vague sense of his meaning, tears welled hot and bitter into her sunny eyes while the pained colour burned in her face. Those tears were the first that she had ever known, and they were cruel ones, though they lasted but a little time; there was too much fire in the young bohemian of the Army not to scorch them as they rose. She stamped her foot on the stones passionately, and her teeth were set like a little terrier's as she muttered:

“Unsexed! Unsexed! Bah, M'sieu l'Aristocrat! If you think so, you shall find your thought right; you shall find Cigarette can hate as men hate, and take her revenge as soldiers take theirs

CHAPTER III.

UNDER THE HOUSES OF HAIR.

IT was just sunset.

The far-off summits of the Djurjura were tinted with the intense glare the distant pines and cypresses cut sharply against the rose-warmed radiance of the sky. On the slopes of the hills white cupolas and terraced gardens, where the Algerine haouach still showed the taste and luxury of Algerine corsairs, rose up among their wild olive shadows on the groves of the lentiscus. In the deep gorges that were channelled between the riven rocks, the luxuriance of African vegetation ran riot, the feathery crests of tossing reeds, the long floating leaves of plants filling the dry water-courses of vanished streams; the broad foliage of the wild fig, and the glowing dainty blossoms of the oleander, wherever a trace of brook, or pool, or rivulet let it put forth its beautiful coronal, growing one in another in the narrow valleys,

and the curving passes, wherever broken earth or rock gave shelter from the blaze and heat of the North African day.

Farther inland the bare scar stretches of brown plain were studded with the dwarf palm, the vast shadowless plateaux were desolate as the great desert itself far beyond; and the sun, as it burned on them a moment in the glory of its last glow, found them naked and grand by the sheer force of immensity and desolation, but dreary and endless, and broken into refts and chasms, as though to make fairer by their own barren solitude the laughing luxuriance of the sea-face of the Sahel.

A moment, and the lustre of the light flung its own magic brilliancy over the Algerine water-line, and then shone full on the heights of El Biar and Bouzariah, and on the lofty, delicate form of the Italian pines that here and there, Sicilian-like, threw out their graceful heads against the amber sun-glow and the deep azure of the heavens. Then swiftly, suddenly, the sun sank; twilight passed like a grey gliding shade, an instant, over earth and sea; and night, the balmy, sultry, star-studded night of Africa, fell over the thirsty leafage longing for its dews, the closed flowers that slumbered at its touch, the seared and blackened plains to which its coolness could bring no herbage, the massive hills that seemed to lie so calmly in its rest.

Camped on one of the bare stretches above the Mustapha Road was a circle of Arab tents. The circle was irregularly kept, and the Krümas were scattered

at will ; here a low one of canvas, there one of goat-skin ; here a white towering canopy of teleze, there a low striped little nest of shelter ; and loftier than all, the stately *beit el shar* of the Sheik, with his standard struck into the earth in front of it, with its heavy folds hanging listlessly in the sultry breathless air.

The encampment stretched far over the level arid earth, and there was more than one tent where the shadowing folds of the banner marked the abode of some noble Djied. Disorder reigned supreme, in all the desert freedom ; horses and mules, goats and camels, tethered, strayed among the conical houses of hair, browsing off the littered straw or the tossed-down hay ; and caldrons seethed and hissed over wood fires, whose lurid light was flung on the eagle features, and the white haiks of the wanderers who watched the boiling of their mess, or fed the embers with dry sticks. Round other fires, having finished the eating of their couscousou, the Bedouins lay full length, enjoying the solemn silence which they love so little to break, and smoking their long pipes, while through the shadows about them glided the lofty figures of their brethren, with the folds of their sweeping burrous floating in the gloom. It was a picture, Rembrandt in colour, Oriental in composition, with the darkness surrounding it stretching out into endless distance that led to the mystic silence of the great desert, and above, the intense blue of the gorgeous night, with the stars burning through white transparent mists of slowly drifting clouds.

In the central tent, tall and crimson striped, with

its mighty standard reared in front, and its opening free to the night, sat the Khalifa, the head of the tribe, with a circle of Arabs about him. He was thrown on his cushions, rich enough for a seraglio, while the rest squatted on the morocco carpet that covered the bare ground, and that was strewn with round brass Moorish trays, and little cups emptied of their coffee. The sides of the tent were hung with guns and swords, lavishly adorned, and in the middle stood a tall Turkish candle-branch in fretted-work, whose light struggled with the white flood of the moon, and the ruddy, fitful glare from a wood fire without.

Beneath its light, which fell full on him, flung down upon another pile of cushions facing the open front of the tent, was a guest whom the Khalifa delighted to honour. Only a Corporal of Chasseurs, and once a foe, yet one with whom the Arab found the brotherhood of brave men, and on whom he lavished, in all he could, the hospitalities and honours of the desert.

The story of their friendship ran thus :

The tribe was now allied with France, or, at least, had accepted French sovereignty, and pledged itself to neutrality in the hostilities still rife ; but a few years before, far in the interior and leagued with the Kabailes, it had been one of the fiercest and most dangerous among the enemies of France. At that time the Khalifa and the Chasseur met in many a skirmish ; hot desperate struggles, where men fought horse to horse, hand to hand ; midnight

frays, when in the heart of lonely ravines, Arab ambuscades fell on squadrons of French cavalry; terrible chases through the heat of torrid suns, when the glittering ranks of the charging troops swept down after the Bedouins' flight; fiery combats, when the desert sand and the smoke of musketry circled in clouds above the close-locked struggle, and the Leopard of France and the Lion of Sahara wrestled in a death-grip.

In these, through four or five seasons of warfare, the Sheik and the Chasseur had encountered each other, till each had grown to look for the other's face as soon as the standards of the Bedouins flashed in the sunshine opposite the guidons of the Imperial forces; till each had watched and noted the other's unmatched prowess, and borne away the wounds of the other's home strokes, with the admiration of a bold soldier for a bold rival's dauntlessness and skill; till each had learned to long for an hour, hitherto always prevented by waves of battle that had swept them too soon asunder, when they should meet in a duello once for all, and try their strength together till one bore off victory and one succumbed to death.

At last it came to pass that after a lengthened term of this chivalrous antagonism the tribe were sorely pressed by the French troops, and could no longer mass its fearless front to face them, but had to flee southward to the desert, and encumbered by its flocks and its women, was hardly driven and greatly decimated. Now among those women was one whom the Sheik held above all earthly things except his honour

in war, a beautiful anteloped-eyed creature, lithe and graceful as a palm, and the daughter of a pure Arab race, on whom he could not endure for any other sight than his own to look, and whom he guarded in his tent as the chief pearl of all his treasures; herds, flocks, arms, even his horses, all, save the honour of his tribe, he would have surrendered rather than surrender Djelma. It was a passion with him; a passion that not even the iron of his temper and the dignity of his austere calm could abate or conceal; and the rumour of it and of the beauty of its object reached the French camp, till an impatient curiosity was roused about her, and a raid that should bear her off became the favourite speculation round the picket-fires at night, and the scorching noons when the men lay stripped to their waist, panting like tired dogs, under the hot withering breath that stole to them from sweeping over the yellow seas of sand.

Their heated fancies had pictured this treasure of the great Djied as something beyond all that her sex had ever given them, and to snare her in some unwary moment was the chief thought of Zéphyr and Spahis when they went out on a scouting or foraging party. But it was easier said than done; the eyes of no Frank ever lit on her, and when he was most closely driven the Khalifa Ilderim abandoned his cattle and sheep, but with the females of the tribe still safely guarded, fell more and more backward and southward, drawing the French on and on farther and farther across the plains in the sickliest times of hottest drought.

Reinforcements could swell the Imperial ranks as

swiftly as they were thinned, but with the Arabs a man once fallen was a man the less to their numbers for ever, and the lightning-like pursuit began to tell terribly on them : their herds had fallen into their pursuers' hands, and famine menaced them. Nevertheless, they were fierce in attack as tigers, rapid in swoop as vultures, and fought flying in such fashion that the cavalry lost more in this fruitless, worthless work, than they would have done in a second Hohenlinden or Austerlitz.

Moreover, the heat was intense, water was bad and very rare, dysentery came with the scorch and the toil of this endless charge; the chief in command, M. le Marquis de Châteauroy, swore heavily as he saw many of his best men dropping off like sheep in a murrain, and he offered two hundred Napoléons to whosoever should bring either the dead Sheik's head or the living beauty of Djelma.

One day the Chasseurs had pitched their camp where a few barren withered trees gave a semblance of shelter, and a little thread of brackish water oozed through the yellow earth.

It was high noon; the African sun was at its fiercest; far as the eye could reach there was only one boundless, burning, unendurable glitter of parching sand and cloudless sky, brazen beneath, brazen above, till the desert and the heavens touched, and blent in one tawny fiery glow in the measureless distance. The men lay under canvas, dead beat, half naked, without the power to do anything except to fight like thirst-maddened dogs for a draught at the

shallow stream that they and their breathless horses soon drained dry.

Even Raoul de Châteauroy, though his frame was like an Arab's, and knit into Arab endurance, was stretched like a great bloodhound, chained by the sultry oppression. He was ruthless, inflexible, a tyrant to the core, and sharp and swift as steel in his rigour, but he was a fine soldier, and never spared himself any of the hardships that his regiment had to endure under him.

Suddenly the noon lethargy of the camp was broken; a trumpet-call rang through the stillness; against the amber transparency of the horizon line the outlines of half a dozen horsemen were seen looming nearer and nearer with every 'moment; they were some Spahis who had been out "*sondant le terrain aux environs.*"* The mighty frame of Châteauroy, almost as unclothed as an athlete, started from its slumberous panting rest; his eyes lightened hungrily; he muttered a fiery oath, "Mort de Dieu!—they have the woman!"

They had the woman. She had been netted near a water-spring, to which she had wandered, too loosely guarded, and too far from the Bedouin encampment. The delight of the laughty Sidi's eyes was borne off to the tents of his foes, and the Colonel's face flushed darkly, with an eager, lustful warmth, as he looked upon his captive. Rumour had not out-boasted the Arab girl's beauty; it was lustrous as ever was that

* Sweeping the country for food.

when, far yonder to the eastward, under the curled palms of Nile, the sorceress of the Cæsars swept through her rose-strewn palace-chambers. Only Djelma was as innocent as the gazelle, whose grace she resembled, and loved her lord with a great love.

Of her suffering her captor took no more heed than if she were a young bird dying of shot-wounds; but, with one triumphant admiring glance at her, he wrote a message in Arabic, to send to the Khalifa, ere her loss were discovered—a message more cruel than iron. He hesitated a second, where he lay at the opening of his tent, whom he should send with it. His men were almost all half dead with the sun-blaze. His glance chanced to light in the distance on a soldier to whom he bore no love—causelessly, but bitterly all the same. He had him summoned, and eyed him with a curious amusement:—Châteauroy treated his squadrons with much the same *sans-façon* familiarity and brutality that a chief of filibusters uses to his.

“So! you heed the heat so little, you give up your turn of water to a drummer, they say?”

The Chasseur gave the salute with a calm deference. A faint flush passed over the sun-bronze of his forehead. He had thought the Sydney-like sacrifice had been unobserved.

“The drummer was but a child, *mon Commandant*.”

“Be so good as to give us no more of those melodramatic acts!” said M. le Marquis, contemptuously. “You are too fond of trafficking in those showy

fooleries. You bribe your comrades for their favouritism too openly. *Ventre-bleu!* I forbid it—do you hear?”

“I hear, *mon Colonel.*”

The assent was perfectly tranquil and respectful. He was too good a soldier not to render perfect obedience, and keep perfect silence, under any goad of provocation to break both.

“Obey, then!” said Châteauroy, savagely. “Well, since you love heat so well, you shall take a flag of truce and my scroll to the Sidi Ilderim. But tell me first—what do you think of this capture?”

“It is not my place to give opinions, M. le Colonel.”

“*Pardieu!* it is your place when I bid you. Speak, or I will have the *matraque* cut the words out of you!”

“I may speak frankly?”

“Ten thousand curses—yes!”

“Then,—I think that those who make war on women are no longer fit to fight with men.”

For a moment the long, sinewy, massive form of Châteauroy started from the skins on which he lay full length, like a lion starting from its lair. His veins swelled like black cords; under the mighty muscle of his bare chest, his heart beat visibly, in the fury of his wrath.

“By God! I have a mind to have you shot like a dog!”

The Chasseur looked at him carelessly, compo-

sedly, but with a serene deference still, as due from a soldier to his chief.

"You have threatened it before, M. le Colonel. It may be as well to do it, or the army may think you capricious."

Raoul de Châteauroy crushed a blasphemous oath through his clenched teeth, and laughed a certain short, stern, sardonic laugh, which his men dreaded more than his wrath.

"No; I will send you instead to the Khalifa. He often saves me the trouble of killing my own curs. Take a flag of truce and this paper, and never draw rein till you reach him, if your beast drop dead at the end."

The Chasseur saluted, took the paper, bowed with a certain languid, easy grace, that camp life never cured him of, and went. He knew that the man who should take the news of his treasure's loss to the Emir Ilderim would, a thousand to one, perish by every torture desert cruelty could frame, despite the cover of the white banner.

Châteauroy looked after him, as he and his horse passed from the French camp in the full burning tide of noon.

"If the Arabs kill him," he thought, "I will forgive Ilderim five seasons of rebellion."

The Chasseur, as he had been bidden, never drew rein across the scorching plateau. He rode to what he knew was like enough to be death, and death by many a torment, as though he rode to a midnight

love-tryst. His horse was of Arab breed—young, fleet, and able to endure extraordinary pressure, both of spur and of heat. He swept on, far and fast, through the sickly lurid glitter of the day, over the loose sand, that flew in puffs around him, as the hoofs struck it flying right and left. At last, ere he reached the Bedouin tents, that were still but slender black points against the horizon, he saw the Sheik and a party of horsemen returning from a foraging quest, and in ignorance as yet of the abduction of Djelma. He galloped straight to them, and halted across their line of march, with the folds of the little white flag fluttering in the sun. The Bedouins drew bridle, and Ilderim advanced alone. He was a magnificent man, of middle age, with the noblest type of the eagle-eyed, aquiline desert beauty. He was a superb specimen of his race, without the lean, withered, rapacious, vulture look, which often mars it. His white haick floated round limbs fit for a Colossus; and under the snowy folds of his turban, the olive-bronze of his bold forehead, the sweep of his jet-black beard, and the piercing luminance of his eyes, had a grand and kingly majesty.

A glance of recognition flashed from him on the lascar, who had so often crossed swords with him; and he waved back the scroll with dignified courtesy.

“Read it me.”

It was read. Bitterly, blackly, shameful, the few

brutal words were. They netted him as an eagle is netted in a shepherd's trap.

The moment that he gave a sign of advancing against his ravishers, the captive's life would pay the penalty: if he merely remained in arms, without direct attack, she would be made the Marquis's mistress, and abandoned later to the army. The only terms on which he could have her restored were instant submission to the imperial rule, and personal homage of himself and all his Djouad to the Marquis as the representative of France; homage in which they should confess themselves dogs and the sons of dogs.

So ran the message of peace.

The Chasseur read on to the end, calmly. Then he lifted his gaze, and looked at the Emir;—he expected fifty swords to be buried in his heart.

As he gazed, he thought no more of his own doom: he thought only of the revelation before him, of what passion and what agony could be—things unknown in the world where the chief portion of his life had passed. He was a war-hardened campaigner, trained in the ruthless school of African hostilities, who had seen every shape of mental and physical suffering, when men were left to perish of gun-wounds, as the rush of the charge swept on; when writhing horses died by the score of famine and of thirst; when the firebrand was hurled among sleeping encampments, and defenceless women were torn from their rest by the unsparing hands of pitiless soldiers. But the

torture, which shook for a second the steel-knit frame of this Arab, passed all that he had dreamed as possible; it was mute, and held in bonds of iron, for the sake of the desert pride of a great ruler's majesty; but it spoke more than any eloquence ever spoke yet on earth.

With a wild shrill yell, the Bedouins whirled their naked sabres above their heads, and rushed down on the bearer of this shame to their chief and their tribe. The Chasseur did not seek to defend himself. He sat motionless. He thought the vengeance just.

The Sheik raised his sword, and signed them back, as he pointed to the white folds of the flag. Then his voice rolled out like thunder over the stillness of the plains:

"But that you trust yourself to my honour, I would rend you limb from limb. Go back to the tiger who rules you, and tell him that—as Allah liveth—I will fall on him and smite him, as he hath never been smitten. Dead or living, I will have back my own. If he take her life, I will have ten thousand lives to answer it: if he deal her dishonour, I will light such a holy war through the length and breadth of the land, that his nation shall be driven backward, like choked dogs into the sea, and perish from the face of the earth for evermore. And this I swear by the Law and the Prophet!"

The menace rolled out, imperious as a monarch's,

thrilling through the desert hush. The Chasseur bent his head as the words closed. His own teeth were tightly clenched, and his face was dark.

"Emir, listen to one word," he said, briefly. "Shame has been done to me as to you. Had I been told what words I bore, they had never been brought by my hand. You know me. You have had the marks of my steel, as I have had the marks of yours. Trust me in this, Sidi. I pledge you my honour, that, before the sun sets, she shall be given back to you unharmed; or I will return here myself, and your tribe shall slay me in what fashion they will. So alone can she be saved uninjured. Answer—will you have faith in me?"

The desert chief looked at him long; sitting motionless as a statue on his stallion, with the fierce gleam of his eyes fixed on the eyes of the man who so long had been his foe in contests whose chivalry equalled their daring. The Chasseur never wavered once under the set, piercing, ruthless gaze.

Then the Emir pointed to the sun, that was now at its zenith :

"You are a great warrior: such men do not lie. Go, and, if she be borne to me before the sun is half-way sunk towards the west, all the branches of the tribes of Ilderim shall be as your brethren, and bend as steel to your bidding. If not—as God is mighty—not one man in all your host shall live to tell the tale!"

The Chasseur bowed his head to his horse's mane ; then, without a word, wheeled round, and sped back across the plain.

When he reached his own cavalry camp, he went straightway to his chief. What passed between them none ever knew. The interview was brief : it was possibly as stormy. Pregnant and decisive it assuredly was ; and the squadrons of Africa marvelled that the man who dared beard Raoul de Châteauroy in his lair, came forth with his life. Whatever the spell he used, the result was a marvel.

At the very moment that the sun touched the lower half of the western heavens, the Sheik Ilderim, where he sat in his saddle, with all his tribe stretching behind him, full armed, to sweep down like falcons on the spoilers, if the hour passed with the pledge unredeemed, saw the form of the Chasseur reappear between his sight and the glare of the skies ; nor did he ride alone. That night the Pearl of the Desert lay once more in the mighty sinuous arms of the great Emir.

But, with the dawn, his vengeance fell in terrible fashion on the sleeping camp of the Franks ; and from that hour dated the passionate, savage, unconcealed hate of Raoul de Châteauroy to the most daring soldier of all his fiery Horse, known in his troop as "*Bel-à-faire-peur*."

It was in the tent of Ilderim now that he reclined, looking outward at the night where flames were leaping ruddily under a large caldron, and far be-

yond was the dark immensity of the star-studded sky. The light of the moon strayed in and fell on the chesnut waves of his beard, out of which the long amber stem of an Arab pipe glittered like a golden line; and the delicate feminine cast of his profile, which, with the fairness of the skin (fair despite a warm hue of bronze) and the long slumberous softness of the hazel eyes, were in as marked a contrast of race with the eagle outline of the Bedouins around as Frank and Arbi ever showed.

From the hour of the restoration of his treasure the Sheik had been true to his oath; his tribe in all its branches had held the French *lascar* in closest brotherhood; wherever they were he was honoured and welcomed; was he in war, their swords were drawn for him; was he in need, their houses of hair were spread for him; had he want of flight, the swiftest and most precious of their horses was at his service; had he thirst, they would have died themselves, wringing out the last drop from the water-skin for him. Through him their alliance, or more justly to speak their neutrality, was secured to France, and the Bedouin Chief loved him with a great, silent, noble love that was fast rooted in the granite of his nature. Between them there was a brotherhood that beat down the antagonism of race, and was stronger than the instinctive hate of the oppressed for all who came under the abhorred standard of the usurpers. He liked the Arabs and they liked him; a grave courtesy, a preference for

the fewest words and least demonstration possible, a marked opinion that silence was golden, and that speech was at best only silver-washed metal, an instinctive dread of all discovery of emotion, and a limitless power of resisting and suppressing suffering, were qualities the nomads of the desert and the *lion* of the Chasseurs d'Afrique had in common; as they had in unison a wild passion for war, a dauntless zest in danger, and a love for the hottest heat of fiercest battle.

Silence reigned in the tent, beyond whose first division, screened by a heavy curtain of goat's hair, the beautiful young Djelmar played with her only son, a child of three or four summers; the Sheik lay mute, the Djouad and Marabouts around never spoke in his presence unless their lord bade them, and the Chasseur was stretched motionless, his elbow resting on a cushion of Morocco fabric, and his eyes looking outward at the restless, changing movement of the firelit, starlit camp.

After the noise, the mirth, the riotous songs, and the gay elastic good-humour of his French comrades, the silence and the calm of the Emir's "house of hair" were welcome to him. He never spoke much himself; of a truth, his gentle immutable laconism was the only charge that his Chambrée ever brought against him. That a man could be so brief in words, while yet so soft in manner, seemed a thing out of all nature to the vivacious Frenchmen; that unchanging stillness and serenity in one who was such a reckless, resistless

croc-mitaine, swift as fire in the field, was an enigma that the Cavalerie and the Demi-cavalerie of Algeria never solved. His corps would have gone after him to the devil, as Claude de Chanrellon had averred; but they would sometimes wax a little impatient that he would never grow communicative or thread many phrases together even over the best wine which ever warmed the hearts of its drinkers or loosened all rein from their lips.

"I wish I had come straight to you, Sidi, when I first set foot in Africa," he said at last, while the fragrant smoke uncurled from under the droop of his long pendent moustaches.

"Truly it had been well," answered the Khalifa, who would have given the best stallions in his stud to have had this Frank with him in warfare and in peace; "there is no life like our life."

"Faith! I think not," murmured the Chasseur, rather to himself than the Bedouin. "The desert keeps you and your horse, and you can let all the rest of the world 'slide.'"

"But we are murderers and pillagers, say your nations," resumed the Emir, with the shadow of a sardonic smile flickering an instant over the sternness and composure of his feature. "To rifle a caravan is a crime, though to steal a continent is glory."

Bel-à-faire-peur laughed slightly.

"Do not tempt me to rebel against my adopted flag."

The Sheik looked at him in silence; the French soldiers had spent twelve years in the ceaseless exer-

tions of an amused inquisitiveness to discover the antecedents of their volunteer; the Arabs, with their loftier instincts of courtesy, had never hinted to him a question of whence or why he had come upon African soil.

"I never thought at all in those days, else, had I thought twice, I should not have gone to your enemies," he answered, as he lazily watched the Bedouins without squat on their heels round the huge brass bowls of couscoussou which they kneaded into round lumps and pitched between their open bearded lips in their customary form of supper. "Not but what our *Roumis* are brave fellows enough; better comrades no man could want."

The Khalifa took the long pipe from his mouth and spoke; his slow sonorous accents falling melodiously on the silence in the *lingua sapir* of the France-Arab tongue.

"Your comrades are gallant men; they are *lascars kébirs*,* and fearless foes, against such my voice is never lifted, however my sword may cross with them. But the locust-swarms that devour the land are the money-eaters, the petty despots, the bribe-takers, the men who wring gold out of infamy, who traffic in tyrannies, who plunder under official seals, who curse Algiers with avarice, with fraud, with routine, with the hell-spawn of civilisation. It is the "Bureaucratie," as your tongue phrases it, that is the spoiler and the oppressor of the soil. But,—In-

* Great warriors.

shallah ! we endure only for a while. A little, and the shame of the invader's tread will be washed out in blood. Allah is great ! We can wait."

And with Moslem patience that the fiery gloom of his burning eyes belied, the Djied stretched himself once more into immovable and silent rest.

The Chasseur answered nothing ; his sympathies were heartfelt with the Arabs, his allegiance and his esprit du corps were with the Service in which he was enrolled. He could not defend French usurpation ; but neither could he condemn the Flag that had now become his Flag, and in which he had grown to feel much of national honour, to take much of national pride.

"They will never really win again, I am afraid," he thought, as his eyes followed the wraith-like flash of the white burnous, as the Bedouins glided to and fro in the chiar'oscuro of the encampment, now in the flicker of the flame, now in the silvered lustre of the moon. "It is the conflict of the races, as the cant runs, and their day is done. It is a bolder, freer, simpler type than anything we get in the world yonder. Shall we ever drift back to it in the future, I wonder ?"

The speculation did not stay with him long ; Semitic, Latin, or Teuton race was very much the same to him, and intellectual subtleties had not much attraction at any time for the most brilliant soldier in the French cavalry ; he preferred the ring of the trumpets, the glitter of the sun's play along the

line of steel as his regiment formed in line on the eve of a life-and-death struggle, the wild breathless sweep of a midnight gallop over the brown swelling plateau under the light of the stars, or,—in some brief interval of indolence and razzia-won wealth,—the gleam of fair eyes and the flush of sparkling sherbet when some passionate darkling glance beamed on him from some Arab mistress whose scarlet lips murmured to him through the drowsy hush of an Algerine night the sense if not the song of Pelagia :

" Life is so short at best !
Take while thou canst thy rest,
Sleeping by me !"

His thoughts drifted back over many varied scenes and changing memories of his service in Algiers, as he lay there at the entrance of the Sheik's tent, with the night of looming shadow, and reddening firelight, and picturesque movement before him. Hours of reckless headlong delight, when men grew drunk with bloodshed as with wine ; hours of horrible, unsuccoured suffering, when the desert thirst had burned in his throat, and the jagged lances been broken off at the hilt in his flesh, while above head the carrion birds wheeled, waiting their meal ; hours of unceasing, unsparing slaughter, when the word was given to slay and yield no mercy, where in the great, vaulted, cavernous gloom of rent rocks, the doomed were hemmed as close as sheep in shambles. Hours, in the warm flush of an African dawn, when the arbiter of the duel was the sole judge allowed or

comprehended by the tigers of the tricolour, and to aim a dead shot or to receive one was the only alternative left, as the challenging eyes of "Zéphyr" or "Chasse-Marais" flashed death across the *barrière*, in a combat where only one might live, thought he root of the quarrel had been nothing more than a toss too much of brandy, a puff of tobacco-smoke construed into insult, or a fille de joie's maliciously cast firebrand of taunt or laugh. Hours of severe discipline, of relentless routine, of bitter deprivation, of campaigns hard as steel in the endurance they needed, in the miseries they entailed; of military subjection, stern and unbending, a yoke of iron that a personal and pitiless tyranny weighted with persecution that was scarce less than hatred; of an implicit obedience that required every instinct of liberty, every habit of early life, every impulse of pride, and manhood, and freedom, to be choked down like crimes, and buried as though they had never been. Hours again, that repaid these in full, when the long line of Horse swept out to the attack, with the sun on the points of their weapons; when the wheeling clouds of Arab riders poured like the clouds of the simoom on a thinned, devoted troop that rallied and fought as hawks fight herons, and saved the day as the sky was flushed with that day's decline; when some soft-eyed captive, with limbs of free mountain grace, and the warm veins flushing under the clear olive of her cheeks, was first wild as a young fettered falcon, and then, like the falcon, quickly learned to tremble at a

touch, and grow tame under a caress, and love nothing so well as the hand that had captured her. Hours of all the chanceful fortunes of a soldier's life, in hill-wars and desert raids, passed in memory through his thoughts now, where he was stretched, looking dreamily through the film of his chibouque smoke at the city of tents, and the couchant forms of camels, and the tall, white, slowly-moving shapes of the lawless marauders of the sand plains.

"Is my life worth much more under the French Flag than it was under the English?" thought the Chasseur, with a certain careless, indifferent irony on himself, natural to him. "There I killed time—here I kill men. Which is the better pursuit, I wonder? The world would rather economise the first commodity than the last, I believe. Perhaps, it don't make an over good use of either."

His thoughts did not stay long with that theme. He was no moralist and no philosopher, though he practised, without ever knowing it, a philosophy of the highest and simplest kind with every day that found him in the ranks of the Algerian army; and had found thought grow on him, in a grave if a desultory fashion, many a time when he had ridden alone through defiles that, for aught he knew, might harbour death with every step; or sat the only wakeful watcher beside a bivouac-fire, while his comrades slept around him, and the roar of angry beasts rolled upward from the ravines; or paced to and fro in solitude on patrol duty, with a yawning mountain

pass, or a limitless night-veiled plain before him in the light of the moon. He was more silent and more meditative than seemed in keeping with a wild *lion* of the Chasseurs, whose daring out-dared all the fire-eaters, and whose negligent courage had become a pass-word all over Africa, till "quel p'tit verre a bu Bel-à-faire-peur?" (alias, "what special exploit has he done to-day?") became the question put after every skirmish or expedition. But he was much more of a soldier than a thinker at any time, and, instead of following out the problem of the world's uses of its two raw materials, time and men, he found a subject more congenial in the discussion of stable science with the Emir.

To him the austere chief would unbend; with him the thin, compressed lips of the Arab would grow eloquent with an impressive oratory; for him all the bonds of hospitality would grow closer and warmer. Ilderim might be a pillager, with a sure swoop, and a merciless steel, as the officials of imperial government wrote him out; of a truth, caravanserais had felt the tear of his talons, and battalions staggered under the blows of his beak; but he had two desert virtues that are obsolete in the civilised world: he had gratitude, and he had sincerity. Of course he was but a nomad, a barbarian, a robber, and a ruler of robbers; of course he was but a half-savage Ishmaelite, or he would long have abandoned them.

The night was someway spent when the talk of wild-pigeon-blue mares and sorrel stallions closed

between the Djied and his guest; and the French soldier, who had been sent hither from the Bureau Arabe with another of his comrades, took his way through the now stilled camp where the cattle were sleeping, and the fires were burning out, and the banner-folds hung motionless in the lustre of the stars, to the black and white tent prepared for him. A spacious one, close to the chief's, and given such luxury in the shape of ornamented weapons, thick carpets, and soft cushions, as the tribe's resources, drawn from many a raid on travellers far south, could bring together to testify their hospitality.

As he opened the folds and entered, his fellow-soldier, who was lying on his back, with his heels much higher than his head, and a short pipe in his teeth, tumbled himself up with a rapid summersault, and stood bolt upright, giving the salute; a short, sturdy little man, with a skin burnt like a coffee-berry, that was in odd contrast with his light dancing blue eyes, and his close-matted curls of yellow hair.

"Beg pardon, sir! I was half asleep!"

The Chasseur laughed a little.

"Don't talk English; somebody will hear you one day."

"What's the odds if they do, sir?" responded the other. "It relieves one's feelins a little. All of 'em know I'm English, but never a one of 'em knew what you are. The name you was enrolled by won't really tell 'em nothing. They guess it ain't yours. That cute little chap, Tata, he says to me yesterday, 'you're always a treatin' of your *galonné* like as if he

was a Prince.' 'Dammee!' says I, 'I'd like to see the Prince as would hold a candle to him.' 'You're right there,' says the little 'un. 'There ain't his equal for takin' off a beggar's head with a back sweep.'"

The Corporal laughed a little again, as he tossed himself down on the carpet.

"Well, it's something to have one virtue! But have a care what those chatterboxes get out of you."

"Lord, sir. Ain't I been a takin' care these ten years? It comes quite natural now. I couldn't keep my tongue still; that wouldn't be in anyways possible. So I've let it run on oiled wheels on a thousand rum tracks and doublins. I've told 'em such a lot of amazin' stories about where we kem from, that they've got half a million different styles to choose out of. Some thinks as how you're a Polish nob, what got into hot water with the Russians; some as how you're a Italian Prince what was cleaned out like Parma and them was; some as how you're a Austrian Archduke that have cut your country because you was in love with the Empress, and had a duel about her that scandalised the whole empire; some as how you're a exiled Spanish grandee a-come to learn tactics and that like, that you may go back, and pitch O'Donnell into the middle of next week, whenever you see a chance to cut in and try conclusions with him. Bless you, sir! you may let *me* alone for bamboozlin' of anybody!"

The Corporal laughed again, as he began to un-

harness himself. There was in him a certain mingling of insouciance and melancholy, each of which alternately predominated; the former his by nature, the latter born of circumstance.

"If you can outwit our friends the Zéphyrs, and the Loustics, and the Indigènes, you have reached a height of diplomacy indeed! I would not engage to do it myself. Take my word for it, ingenuity is always dangerous—silence is always safe."

"That may be, sir," responded the Chasseur, in the sturdy English with which his bright blue eyes danced a fitting nationality. "No doubt it's uncommon good for them as can bring their minds to it—just like water instead o' wine—but it's very tryin', like the teetotalism. You might as well tell a Newfoundland not to love a splash as me not to love a chatter. I'd cut my tongue out sooner than say never a word that you don't wish—but say *some*thin' I must, or die for it."

With which the speaker, known to Algerian fame by the sobriquet of *Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort*, from the hair-breadth escapes and reckless razzias from which he had come out without a scratch, dropped on his knees, and began to take off the trappings of his fellow-soldier, with as reverential a service as though he were a Lord of the Bedchamber serving a Louis Quatorze. The other motioned him gently away.

"No, no. I have told you a thousand times we are comrades and equals now."

"And I've told you a thousand times, sir, that we

aren't, and never will be, and don't oughtn't to be," replied the soldier, doggedly, drawing off the spurred and dust-covered boots. "A gentleman's a gentleman, let alone what straits he fall into."

"But ceases to be one as soon as he takes a service he cannot requite, or claims a superiority he does not possess. We have been fellow-soldiers for twelve years——"

"So we have, sir; but we are what we always was, and always will be—one a gentleman, t'other a scamp. If you think so be as I've done a good thing side by side with you now and then in the fightin', give me my own way and let me wait on you when I can. I can't do much on it when those other fellows' eyes is on us; but here I can and I will—beggin' your pardon—so there's an end of it. One may speak plain in this place with nothing but them Arabs about; and all the Army know well enough, sir, that if it weren't for that black devil, Châteauroy, you'd have had your officer's commission and your troop too long before now——"

"Oh no. There are scores of men in the ranks merit promotion better far than I do. And,—leave the Colonel's name alone. He is our chief, whatever else he be."

The words were calm and careless, but they carried a weight with them that was not to be disputed; "Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort" hung his head a little and went on unharnessing his Corporal in silence, contenting himself with muttering in his throat that

it was true for all that, and the whole regiment knew it.

"You are happy enough in Algeria—eh?" asked the one he served, as he stretched himself on the skins and carpets, and drank down a sherbet that his self-attached attendant had made with a skill learned from a pretty cantinière who had given him the lesson in return for a slashing blow with which he had struck down two "Riz-pain-sels," who as the best paid men in the army had tried to cheat her in the price of her cognac.

"I, sir? Never was so happy in my life, sir. I'd be discontented indeed if I wasn't. Always some spicy bit of fighting. If there aren't a fantasia, as they call it, in the field, there's always somebody to pot in a small way; and if you're lying by in barracks there's always a scrimmage hot as pepper to be got up with fellows that love the row just as well as you do. It's life, that's where it is; it ain't rustin'."

"Then you prefer the French service?"

"Right and away, sir. You see this is how it is," and the redoubtable yellow-haired "Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort" paused in the vigorous cleansing and brushing he was bestowing on his Corporal's uniform, and stood at ease in his shirt and trousers with his eloquence noway impeded by the *brûle-gueule* that was always between his teeth. "Over there in England, you know, sir, pipeclay is the deuce-and-all, you've always got to have the stock on, and look as stiff as a stake, or it's all up with you; you're that

tormented about little things that you get riled and kick the traces before the great 'uns come to try you. There's a lot of lads would be game as game could be in battle, ay, and good lads to boot, doing their duty right as a trivet when it came to anything like war, that are clean druv' out of the service in time o' peace, along with all them petty persecutions that worry a man's skin like mosquito-bites. Now here they know that, and Lord! what soldiers they do make thro' knowing of it! It's tight enough and stern enough in big things; martial law sharp enough, and obedience to the letter all through the campaigning; but that don't grate on a fellow; if he's worth his salt he's sure to understand that he must move like clockwork in a fight, and that he's to go to hell at double-quick-march, and mute as a mouse, if his officers see fit to send him. *That's* all right, but they don't fidget you here about the little fal-lals; you may stick your pipe in your mouth, you may have your lark, you may do as you like, you may spend your *décompte* how you choose, you may settle your little duel as you will, you may shout and sing and jump and riot on the march, so long as you *march on*; you may lounge about half-dressed in any style as suits you best, so long as you're up to time when the trumpets sound for you; and that's what a man likes. He's ready to be a machine when the machine's wanted in working trim, but when it's run off the line and the steam all let off, he do like to oil his own wheels, and lie a bit in the sun at his

fancy. There aren't better stuff to make soldiers out of nowhere than Englishmen, God bless 'em! but they're badgered, they're horribly badgered, and that's why the Service don't take over there, let alone the way the country grudge 'em every bit of pay. In England you go in the ranks—well, they all just tell you you're a blackguard, and there's the lash, and you'd better behave yourself or you'll get it hot and hot; they take for granted you're a bad lot or you wouldn't be there, and in course you're riled and go to the bad according, seeing that it's what's expected of you. Here, contrariwise, you come in the ranks and get a welcome, and feel that it just rests with yourself whether you won't be a fine fellow or not; and just along of feelin' that you're pricked to show the best metal you're made on, and not to let nobody else beat you out of the race like. Ah! it makes a wonderful difference to a fellow—a wonderful difference—whether the service he's come into look at him as a scamp that never will be nothin' *but* a scamp, or as a rascal that's maybe got in him, all rascal though he is, the pluck to turn into a hero. It makes a wonderful difference, this 'ere, whether you're looked at as stuff that's only fit to be shovelled into the sand after a battle, or as stuff that'll belike churn into a great man. And it's just that difference, sir, that France has found out, and England hasn't—God bless her all the same!"

With which the soldier whom England had turned adrift, and France had won in her stead, concluded

his long oration by dropping on his knees to refill his corporal's chibouque.

"A army's just a machine, sir, in course," he concluded, as he rammed in the Turkish tobacco. "But then it's a live machine for all that; and each little bit of it feels for itself like the joints in an eel's body. Now, if only one of them little bits smarts, the whole crittur goes wrong—there's the mischief."

Bel-à-faire-peur listened thoughtfully to his comrade where he lay flung full length on the skins.

"I dare say you are right enough. I knew nothing of my men when—when I was in England; we none of us did; but I can very well believe what you say. Yet—fine fellows though they are here, they are terrible blackguards!"

"In course they are, sir; they wouldn't be such larky company unless they was. But what I say is that they're scamps who're told they may be great men if they like; not scamps who're told that because they're once gone to the devil they must always keep there. It makes all the difference in life."

"Yes—it makes all the difference in life, whether hope is left, or—left out!"

The words were murmured with a half smile that had a dash of infinite sadness in it; the other looked at him quickly with a shadow of keen pain passing over the bright, frank, laughing features of his sun-burnt face; he knew that the brief words held the whole history of a life.

"Won't there *never* be no hope, sir?" he whis-

pered, while his voice trembled a little under the long fierce "Zéphyr" sweep of his yellow moustaches.

The Chasseur rallied himself with a slight, careless laugh; the laugh with which he had met before now the onslaught of charges ferocious as those of the magnificent day of Mazagran.

"Whom for? Both of us? Oh yes, very likely we shall achieve fame, and die sous-officiers or gardes-champêtres! A splendid destiny."

"No, sir," said the other, with the hesitation still in the quiver of his voice. "You know I meant, no hope of your ever being again——"

He stopped; he scarcely knew how to phrase the thoughts he was thinking.

The other moved with a certain impatience.

"How often must I tell you to forget that I was ever anything except a soldier of France?—forget as I have forgotten it?"

The audacious, irrepressible "Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort," whom nothing could daunt and nothing could awe, looked penitent and ashamed as a chidden spaniel.

"I know, sir. I have tried many a year, but I thought, perhaps, as how his Lordship's death——"

"No life and no death can make any difference to me, except the death that some day an Arbico's lunge will give me; and that is a long time coming."

"Ah, for God's sake, Mr. Cecil, don't talk like this!"

The Chasseur gave a short, sharp shiver, and started at the name, as if a bullet had struck him.

"Never say that again!"

Rake, Algerian-christened *Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort*, stammered a contrite apology.

"I never have done, sir,—not for never a year, but it wrung it out of me like—you talking of wanting death in that way——"

"Oh, I don't want death!" laughed the other, with a low, indifferent laughter, that had in it a singular tone of sadness all the while. "I am of our friends the Spahis' opinion—that life is very pleasant with a handsome well-chosen harem, and a good horse to one's saddle. Unhappily, harems are too expensive for Roumis! Yet I am not sure that I am not better amused in the Chasseurs than I was in the Household—specially when we are at war. I suppose we must be wild animals at the core, or we should never find such an infinite zest in the death-grapple. Good night!"

He stretched his long, slender, symmetrical limbs out on the skins that made his bed, and closed his eyes, with the chibouque still in his mouth, and its amber bowl resting on the carpet, which the friendship and honour of Sidi-Ilderim had strewn over the bare turf, on which the house of hair was raised. He was accustomed to sleep as soldiers sleep, in all the din of a camp, or with the roar of savage brutes echoing from the hills around, with his saddle beneath his head, under a slab of rock, or with the

knowledge that at every instant the alarm might be given, the drums roll out over the night, and the enemy be down like lightning on the bivouac. But now a name—long unspoken to him—had recalled years he had buried far and for ever from the first day that he had worn the *képi d'ordonnance* of the Army of Algeria, and been enrolled amongst its wild and brilliant soldiers.

Now, long after his comrade had slept soundly, and the light in the single bronze Turkish candle-branch had flickered and died away, the Chasseur d'Afrique lay wakeful, looking outward through the folds of the tent at the dark and silent camp of the Arabs, and letting his memory drift backward to a time that had grown to be to him as a dream—a time when another world than the world of Africa had known him as Bertie Cecil.

CHAPTER IV.

CIGARETTE EN BIENFAITRICE.

"OH hé! We are a queer lot; a very queer lot. Sweepings of Europe," said Claude de Chanrellon, dashing some vermouth off his golden moustaches, where he lay full length on three chairs outside the café in the Place du Gouvernement, where the lamps were just alit, and shining through the burnished moonlight of an Algerian evening, and the many-coloured, many-raced, picturesque, and polyglot population of the town were all fluttering out with the sunset, like so many gay-coloured moths.

"Hein! Diamonds are found in the *chiffonnier's* sweepings," growled a General of Division, who was the most terrible martinet in the whole of the French service, but who loved "*mes enfans d'enfer*," as he was wont to term his men, with a great love, and who would never hear another disparage them, how-

ever he might order them blows of the *matraque*, or exile them to Beylick himself.

"You are poetic, mon Général," said Claude de Chanrellon ; "but you are true. We are a furnace in which Blackguardism is burnt into Dare-devilry, and turned out as Heroism. A fine manufacture that, and one at which France has no equal."

"But our manufactures keep the original hall-mark, and show that the devil made them if the drill have moulded them!" urged a Colonel of Tirailleurs Indigènes.

Chanrellon laughed, knocking the ash off a huge cigar.

"Pardieu! We do our original maker credit, then; nothing good in this world without a dash of diablerie. Scruples are the wet blankets, proprieties are the blank walls, principles are the quickset-hedges of life, but devilry is its champagne!"

"Ventre-bleu!" growled the General. "We have a right to praise the blackguards; without them our conscripts would be very poor trash. The conscript fights because he has to fight, the blackguard fights because he loves to fight. A great difference that."

The Colonel of Tirailleurs lifted his eyes; a slight pale effeminate dark-eyed Parisian, who looked scarcely stronger than a hothouse flower, yet who, as many an African chronicle could tell, was swift as fire, keen as steel, unerring as a leopard's leap, untiring as an Indian on trail, once in the field with his Indigènes.

"In proportion as one loves powder, one has been a scoundrel, mon Général," he murmured; "what the catalogue of your crimes must be!"

The tough old campaigner laughed grimly; he took it as a high compliment.

"Sapristi! The cardinal virtues don't send anybody, I guess, into African service. And yet, pardieu, I don't know. What fellows I have known! I have had men among my Zéphyr^s—and they were the wildest *pratiques* too—that would have ruled the world! I have had more wit, more address, more genius, more devotion, in some headlong scamp of a *loustic* than all the courts and cabinets would furnish. Such lives, such lives too, morbleu!"

And he drained his absinthe thoughtfully, musing on the marvellous vicissitudes of war, and on the patrician blood, the wasted wit, the Beaumarchais talent, the Mirabeau power, the adventures like a page of fairy tale, the brains whose strength could have guided a sceptre, which he had found and known, hidden under the rough uniform of a Zéphyr, buried beneath the canvas shirts of a Roumi, lost for ever in the wild lawless escapades of rebellious *pratiques*,* who closed their days in the stifling darkness of the dungeons of Beylick, or in some obscure skirmish, some midnight vidette, where an Arab flissa severed the cord of the warped life, and the death was unhonoured by even a line in the *Gazettes du Jour*.

* Insubordinates.

"Faith!" laughed Chanrellon, regardless of the General's observation, "if we all published our memoirs, the world would have a droll book. Dumas and Terrail would be beat out of the field. The real recruiting-sergeants that send us to the ranks would be soon found to be——"

"Women," growled the General.

"Cards," sighed the Colonel.

"Absinthe," muttered another.

"Mussetism in a garret."

"Politics *un peu trop fort*."

"A comedy that was hissed."

"Carbonarist vows when one was a fool."

"The spleen."

"The dice."

"The roulette."

"The natural desire of humanity to kill and to get killed!"

"Morbleu!" cried Chanrellon, as the voices closed, "all those mischiefs beat the drum, and send volunteers to the ranks, sure enough; but the General named the worst. Look at that little Cora; the Minister of War should give her the Cross. She sends us ten times more fire-eaters than the Conscriptio*n* does. Five fine fellows—of the *vieille roche* too—joined to-day, because she has stripped them of everything, and they have nothing for it but the service. She is invaluable, Cora."

"And there is not much to look at in her either,"

objected a Captain, who commanded Turcos. "I saw her when our detachment went to show in Paris. A baby face, innocent as a cherub—a soft voice—a shape that looks as slight and as breakable as the stem of my glass—there is the end!"

The Colonel of Tirailleurs laughed scornfully but gently; he had been a great *lion* of the fashionable world before he came out to his Indigènes.

"The end of Cora! The end of her is—'*l'Enfer*!' My good Alcide—that 'baby face' has ruined more of us than would make up a battalion. She is so quiet, so tender; smiles like an angel, glides like a fawn; is a little sad too, the innocent dove; looks at you with eyes as clear as water, and paf! before you know where you are, she has pillaged with both hands, and you wake one fine morning bankrupt!"

"Why do you let her do it?" growled the *vieille moustache*, who had served under Junot when a little lad, and had scant knowledge of the ways and wiles of the syrens of the Rue Bréda.

"Ah-bah!" said the Colonel, with a shrug of his shoulders; "it is the thing to be ruined by Cora. There is Bébée-je-m'enfous; there is Blonde-Miou-Miou; there is the Cerisette; there is Neroli; there is Loto—any one of them is equally good style with Cora; but to be at all in the fashion, one must have been talked of with one of the six."

"Diantre!" sighed Claude de Chanrellon, stretching his handsome limbs, with a sigh of recollection;

for Paris had been a Paradise Lost to him for many seasons, and he had had of late years but one solitary glimpse of it. "It was Cœur d'Acier who was the rage in my time. She ate me up—that woman—in three months. I had not a hundred francs left: she stripped me as bare as a pigeon. Her passion was emeralds *en cabochon* just then. Well, emeralds *en cabochon* made an end of me, and sent me out here. Cœur d'Acier was a wonderful woman!—and the chief wonder of her was, that she was as ugly as sin."

"Ugly?"

"Ugly as sin! But she had the knack of making herself more charming than Venus. How she did it nobody knew; but men left the prettiest creatures for her: and she ruined us, I think, at the rate of a score a month."

"Like Loto," chimed in the Tirailleur. "Loto has not a shred of beauty. She is a big, angular, raw-boned Normande, with a rough voice, and a villanous patois; but to be well with Loto is to have achieved distinction at once. She will have nothing under the third order of nobility; and Prince Paul shot the Duc de Var about her the other day. She is a great creature, Loto: nobody knows her secret."

"*L'audace, mon ami; toujours de l'audace,*" said Chanrellon, with a twist of his superb moustaches. "It is the finest quality out; nothing so sure to win."

Hallo! there is *le beau caporal* listening. Ah! Bel-à-faire-peur, you fell, too, among the Lotos and the Cœurs d'Acier once, I will warrant."

The Chasseur, who was passing, paused and smiled a little as he saluted.

"Cœurs d'Acier are to be found in all ranks of the sex, monsieur, I fancy?"

"Bah! you beg the question. Did not a woman send you out here—eh?"

"No, monsieur,—only chance."

"A fig for your chance! Women are the mischief that casts us adrift to chance."

"Monsieur, we cast ourselves sometimes."

"Dieu de Dieu! I doubt that. We should go straight enough if it were not for them."

The Chasseur smiled again.

"M. le Viscomte thinks we are sure to be right then, if, for the key to every black story, we ask, 'Who was she?'"

"Of course I do. Well! who was she? We are all quoting our tempters to-night. Give us your story, *mon brave*!"

"Monsieur, you have it in the *folios matricules*, as well as my sword could write it."

"Good, good!" muttered the listening General. The soldier-like answer pleased him, and he looked attentively at the giver of it.

Chanrellon's brown eyes flashed a bright response.

"And your sword writes in a brave man's fashion—writes what France loves to read. But before you

wore your sword here? Tell us of that. It was a romance—wasn't it?"

"If it were, I have folded down the page, monsieur."

"Open it, then! Come—what brought you out amongst us? You had gamed *au roi dépouillé*—that was it? Out with it!"

"Monsieur, direct obedience is a soldier's duty; but I never heard that inquisitive annoyance was an officer's privilege?"

The words were calm, cold, a little languid, and a little haughty. The manner of old habit, the instinct of buried pride, spoke in them, and disregarded the barrier between a private of Chasseurs who was but a sous-officier, and a Colonel Commandant who was also a noble of France.

Involuntarily, all the men sitting round the little tables, outside the café, turned and looked at him. The boldness of speech and the quietude of tone drew all their eyes in curiosity upon him.

Chanrellon flushed scarlet over his frank brow, and an instant's passion gleamed out of his eyes: the next, he threw his three chairs down with a crash, as he shook his mighty frame like an Alpine dog, and bowed with a French grace, with a campaigner's frankness.

"A right rebuke!—fairly given, and well deserved. I thank you for the lesson."

The Chasseur looked surprised and moved; in truth, he was more touched than he showed. Under

the rule of Châteauroy, consideration or courtesy had been things long unshown to him. Involuntarily, forgetful of rank, he stretched his hand out, on the impulse of soldier to soldier, of gentleman to gentleman. Then, as the bitter remembrance of the difference of rank and station between them flashed on his memory, he was raising it, proudly but deferentially, in the salute of a subordinate to his superior, when Chanrellon's grasp closed on it readily. The victim of Cœur d'Acier was of as gallant a temper as ever blent the reckless *condottière* with the thoroughbred noble.

The Chasseur coloured slightly, as he remembered that he had forgotten alike his own position and their relative stations.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Vicomte," he said, simply, as he gave the salute with ceremonious grace, and passed onward rapidly, as though he wished to forget and to have forgotten the momentary self-oblivion of which he had been guilty.

"Dieu!" muttered Chanrellon, as he looked after him, and struck his hand on the marble-topped table till the glasses shook. "I would give a year's pay to know that fine fellow's history. He is a gentleman—every inch of him."

"And a good soldier, which is better," growled the General of Brigade, who had begun life in his time driving an ox-plough over the heavy tillage of Alsace.

"A private of Châteauroy's—eh?" asked the

Tirailleur, lifting his eye-glass to watch the Chasseur as he went.

"Pardieu,—yes,—more's the pity," said Chanrelon, who spoke his thoughts as hastily as a hand-grenade scatters its powder. "The Black Hawk hates him—God knows why—and he is kept down in consequence, as if he were the idlest lout or the most incorrigible rebel in the service. Look at what he has done. All the Bureaux will tell you there is not a finer Roumi in Africa—not even among our Schouacks! Since he joined, there has not been a hot and heavy thing with the Arabs that he has not had his share in. There has not been a campaign in Oran or Kabaila that he has not gone out with. His limbs are slashed all over with Bedouin steel. He rode once twenty leagues to deliver despatches with a spear-head in his side, and fell, in a dead faint, out of his saddle just as he gave them up to the commandant's own hands. He saved the day, two years ago, at Granaila. We should have been cut to pieces, as sure as destiny, if he had not collected a handful of broken Chasseurs together, and rallied them, and rated them, and lashed them with their shame, till they dashed with him to a man into the thickest of the fight, and pierced the Arabs' centre, and gave us breathing room, till we all charged together, and beat the *Arbicos* back like a herd of jackals. There are a hundred more like stories of him—every one of them true as my sabre;—and, in reward, he has just been made a *galonné*!"

"Superb!" said the General, with grim signifi-

cance. "*Ce n'est pas à la France—ça!* Twelve years! In five under Napoléon, he would have been at the head of a brigade; but then"—and the veteran drank his absinthe with a regretful melancholy—"but then, Napoléon read his men himself and never read them wrong. It is a divine gift that for commanders."

"The Black Hawk can read, too," said Chanrellon, meditatively; it was the "*petit nom*," that Château-roy had gained long before, and by which he was best known through the army. "No eyes are keener than his, to trace a *lascar kébir*. But, where he hates, he strikes beak and talons—pong!—till the thing drops dead—even where he strikes a bird of his own brood."

"That is bad," said the old General, sententiously. "There are four people who should have no personal likes or dislikes: they are an innkeeper, a school-master, a ship's skipper, and a military chief."

With which axiom he called for some more *vert-vert*.

Meanwhile, the Chasseur went his way through the cosmopolitan groups of the great square. A little farther onward, laughing, smoking, chatting, eating ices outside a *Café Chantant*, were a group of Englishmen—a yachting party, whose schooner lay in the harbour. He lingered a moment, and lighted a fusee, just for sake of hearing the old familiar words. As he bent his head above the vesuvian, no one saw the shadow of pain that passed over his face.

But one of them looked at him curiously and earnestly. "The deuce," he murmured to the man nearest him, "who the dickens is it that French soldier's like?"

The French soldier heard, and, with the cigar in his teeth, moved away quickly. He was uneasy in the city—uneasy lest he should be recognised by any passer-by or tourist.

"I need not fear that, though," he thought with a smile. "Twelve years!—why, in *that* world, we used to forget the blackest ruin in ten days, and the best life amongst us ten hours after its grave was closed. Besides, I am safe enough. I am dead!"

And he pursued his onward way, with the red glow of the cigar under the chesnut splendour of his beard, and the black eyes of veiled Moresco women flashed lovingly on his tall lithe form, with the scarlet *ceinturon* swathed round his loins, and the scarlet undress fez set on his forehead, fair as a woman's still, despite the tawny glow of the Afric sun that had been on it for so long.

He was "dead;" therein had laid all his security; thereby had "Beauty of the Brigades" been buried beyond all discovery in "Bel-à-faire-peur" of the 2nd Chasseurs d'Afrique. When, on the Marseilles rails, the maceration and slaughter of as terrible an accident as ever befel a train rushing through midnight darkness, at headlong speed, had left himself and the one man faithful to his fortunes unharmed by little less than a miracle, he had seen in the calamity the surest screen from discovery or pursuit.

Leaving the baggage where it was jammed among the débris, he had struck across the country with Rake for the few leagues that still lay between them and the city, and had entered Marseilles as weary foot travellers, before half the ruin on the rails had been seen by the full noon sun.

As it chanced, a trading yawl was loading in the port, to run across to Algiers that very day. The skipper was short of men, and afraid of the Lascars, who were the only sailors that he seemed likely to find, to fill up the vacant places in his small crew.

Cecil offered himself and his comrade for the passage. He had only a very few gold pieces on his person, and he was willing to work his way across, if he could.

"But you're a gentleman," said the skipper, doubtfully eyeing him, and his velvet dress, and his black *sombrero* with its eagle's plume. "I want a rare, rough, able seaman, for there'll be like to be foul weather. She looks too fair to last," he concluded, with a glance upward at the sky.

He was a Liverpool man, master and owner of his own rakish-looking little black-hulled craft, that, rumour was wont to say, was not averse to a bit of slaving, if she found herself in far seas, with a likely run before her.

"You're a swell, that's what you are," emphasized the skipper. "You bean't no sort of use to me."

"Wait a second," answered Cecil. "Did you ever chance to hear of a schooner called *Regina*?"

The skipper's face lighted in a moment.

"Her as was in the Biscay, July come two years?—her as druv' through the storm like a mad thing, and flew like a swallow, when everything was splittin' and founderin', and shipping seas around her?—her as was the first to bear down to the great *Wrestler*, a-lyin' there hull over in water, and took aboard all as ever she could hold o' the passengers, a-pitchin' out her own beautiful cabin fittins to have as much room for the poor wretches as ever she could? Be you a-meanin' her?"

Cecil nodded assent.

"She was my yacht, that's all; and I was without a captain through that storm. Will you think me a good enough sailor now?"

The skipper wrung his hand, till he nearly wrung it off.

"Good enough! Blast my timbers! there aren't one will beat you in any waters. Come on, sir, if so be as you wishes it; but never a stroke of work shall you do atween *my* decks. I never did think as how one of your yachting-nobs could ever be fit to lay hold of a tiller; but, hang me, if the Club make such sailors as you it's a rare 'un! Lord a mercy! why my wife was in the *Wrestler*. I've heard her tell scores of times as how she was a'most dead when that little yacht came through a swaling sea, that was all heavin' and roarin' round the wreck, and as how the swell what owned it gev' his cabin up to the womenkind, and had his swivel-guns and his handsome furniture

pitched overboard, that he might be able to carry more passengers, and fed 'em, and gev' 'em champagne all round, and treated 'em like a Prince, till he ran 'em straight into Brest Harbour. But, damn me! that ever a swell like you should——”

“Let's weigh anchor,” said Bertie, quietly.

And so he crossed unnoticed to Algeria, while through Europe the tidings went, that the mutilated form, crushed between iron and wood, on the Marseilles line, was his, and that he had perished in that awful, ink-black, sultry southern night, when the rushing trains had met, as meet the thunder-clouds. The world thought him dead; as such, the journals recorded him, with the shameful outlines of imputed crime, to make the death the darker; as such, his name was forbidden to be uttered at Royallieu; as such, the Seraph mourned him with passionate loving force, refusing to the last to accredit his guilt:—and he, leaving them in their error, was drafted into the French Army under two of his christian names, which happily had a foreign sound—Louis Victor—and laid aside for ever his identity as Bertie Cecil.

He went at once on service in the interior, and had scarcely come in any of the larger towns since he had joined. His only danger of recognition had once been when a Marshal of France, whom he had used to know well in Paris and at the Court of St. James, held an inspection of the African troops.

Filing past the brilliant staff, he had ridden at only

a few yards' distance from his old acquaintance, and, as he saluted, had glanced involuntarily at the face that he had seen oftentimes in the Salles des Mârchaux, and even under the roof of Royallieu. The great chief's keen blue eyes were scrutinising the regiment, ready to note a chain loose, a belt awry, a sword specked with rust, if such a sin there were against "*les ordonnances*" in all the glittering squadrons; and swept over him, seeing in him but one among thousands—a unit in the mighty aggregate of the "raw material" of war.

The Marshal only muttered to a General beside him, "Why don't they all ride like that man? He has the seat of the English Guards." But that it was in truth an officer of the English Guards, and a friend of his own, who paced past him as a private of Algerian Horse, the French leader never dreamed.

From the extremes of luxury, indolence, indulgence, pleasure, and extravagance, Cecil came to the extremes of hardship, poverty, discipline, suffering, and toil. From a life where every sense was gratified, he came to a life where every privation was endured. He had led the fashion;—he came where he had to bear without a word the curses, oaths, and insults of a corporal or a sous-lieutenant. He had been used to every delicacy and delight;—he came where he had to take the coarse black bread of the army as a rich repast. He had thought it too much trouble to murmur flatteries in great ladies' ears;—he came where morning, noon, and night the

inexorable demands of rigid rules compelled his incessant obedience, vigilance, activity, and self-denial. He had known nothing from his childhood up except an atmosphere of amusement, refinement, brilliancy, and idleness;—he came where gnawing hunger, brutalised jest, ceaseless toil, coarse obscenity, agonised pain, and pandemoniac mirth, alternately filled the measure of the days.

A sharper contrast, a darker ordeal, rarely tried the steel of any man's endurance; yet, under it, he verified the truth, "*Bon sang ne peut mentir.*" No Spartan could have borne the change more mutely, more staunchly, than did the "dandy of the Household."

The first years were, it is true, years of intense misery to him. Misery, when all the blood glowed in him under some petty tyrant's jibe, and he had to stand immovable, holding his peace. Misery, when the hunger and thirst of long marches tortured him, and his soul sickened at the half-raw offal, and the water thick with dust, and stained with blood, which the men round him seized so ravenously. Misery, when the dreary dawn broke, only to usher in a day of mechanical manœuvres, of petty tyrannies, of barren burdensome hours in the exercise-ground, of convoy duty in the burning sun-glare, and under the heat of harness; and the weary night fell with the din and uproar, and the villanous blasphemy, and befouled merriment of the riotous Chambrée, that denied even the peace and oblivion of sleep. They

were years of infinite wretchedness oftentimes, only relieved by the loyalty and devotion of the man who had followed him into his exile. But, however wretched, they never wrung a single regret or lament from Cecil. He had come out to this life; he took it as it was. As, having lost the title to command, the high breeding in him made him render implicitly the mute obedience which was the first duty of his present position, so it made him accept, from first to last, without a sign of complaint or of impatience, the altered fortunes of his career. The hardest-trained, lowest-born, longest-inured soldier in the Zephyr ranks did not bear himself with more apparent content and more absolute fortitude than did the man who had used to think it a cruelty to ride with his troop from Windsor to Wormwood Scrubs, and had never taken the trouble to load his own gun any shooting season, or to draw off his own coat any evening. He suffered acutely many times; suffered till he was heart-sick of his life; but he never sought to escape the slightest penalty or hardship, and not even Rake ever heard from him a single syllable of irritation or of self-pity.

Moreover, the war-fire woke in him.

In one shape or another, active service was almost always his lot, and hot, severe campaigning was his first introduction to military life in Algeria. The latent instinct in him—the instinct that had flashed out during his lazy fashionable calm in all moments of danger, in all days of keen sport; the instinct that

had made him fling himself into the duello with the French boar, and made him mutter to Forest King, "Kill me if you like, but don't *fail* me!"—was the instinct of the born soldier. In peril, in battle, in reckless bravery, in the rush of the charge, and the excitement of the surprise, in the near presence of death, and in the chase of a foe through a hot African night when both were armed to the teeth, and one or both must fall when the grapple came—in all these that old instinct, aroused and unloosed, made him content; made him think that the life which brought them was worth the living.

There had always been in him a reckless daredevilry, which had slept under the serene effeminate insouciance of his careless temper and his pampered habits. It had full rein now, and made him, as the army affirmed, one of the most intrepid, victorious, and chivalrous *lascars* of its fiery ranks. Fate had flung him off his couch of down into the tempest of war, into the sternness of life spent ever on the border of the grave, ruled ever by an iron code, requiring at every step self-negation, fortitude, submission, courage, patience, the self-control which should take the uttermost provocation from those in command without even a look of reprisal, and the courageous recklessness which should meet death, and deal death, which should be as the eagle to swoop, as the lion to rend. And he was not found wanting in it.

He was too thorough-bred to attempt to claim a

superiority that fortune no longer conferred on him, to seek to obtain a deference that he had no longer the position to demand. He obeyed far more implicitly than many a ruffian filibuster, who had been amongst the dregs of society from his birth. And though his quick-eyed comrades knew, before he had been amongst them five minutes, that an "aristocrat" had taken refuge under the Flag of Mazagran, they never experienced from him one touch of the insolence that their own sous-officiers beat them with, as with the flat of the sword; and they never found in him one shadow of the arrogance that some fellow-soldier, who had swelled into a sergeant-major, or bristled into an adjutant, would strut with, like any turkey-cock.

He was too quiet, too courteous, too calmly listless; he had too easy a grace, too soft a voice, and too many gentleman-habits, for them. But when they found that he could fight like a Zouave, ride like an Arab, and bear shot-wounds or desert-thirst as though he were of bronze, it grew a delight to them to see of what granite and steel this dainty patrician was made; and they loved him with a rough, ardent, dog-like love, when they found that his last crust, in a long march, would always be divided; that the most desperate service of danger was always volunteered for by him; that no severity of personal chastisement ever made him clear himself of a false charge at a comrade's expense; and that all his *décompte* went in giving a veteran a stoup of wine,

or a sick conscript a tempting meal, or a prisoner of Beylick some food through the grating, scaled too at risk of life and limb.

Cecil had all a soldier's temper in him; and the shock which had hurled him out of ease, and levity, and ultra-luxury, to stand alone before as dark and rugged a fortune as ever fronted any man, had awakened the war-fire which had only slumbered because lulled by habit, and unaroused by circumstance. He had never before been called on to exert either thought or action: the necessity for both called many latent qualities in him into play. The same nature, which had made him wish to be killed over the Grand Military course, rather than live to lose the race, made him now bear privation as calmly, and risk death as recklessly, as the hardiest and most fiery *loustic* of the African cantonments.

Bitter as the life often was, severe the suffering, and acute the deprivation, the sternest veteran scarcely took them more patiently, more silently, than the "aristocrat," to whom a corked claret or a dusty race-day had been calamities. Cast among these wild, iron-muscled bohemians, who fought like tigers, and were as impenetrable as rhinoceri, "race" was too strong in Cecil not to hold its own with them, whether in the quality of endurance, or the quality of daring.

"*Main de femme, mais main de fer,*" the Roumis were wont to say of their comrade, with his delicate habits, "*comme une Marquise du Faubourg,*" as

they would growl impatiently; and his tenacious patience, which would never give way either in the toil of the camp or the grip of the struggle.

On the surface it seemed as though never was there a life more utterly thrown away than the life of a Guardsman and a gentleman, a man of good blood, high rank, and talented gifts had he ever chosen to make anything of them, buried in the ranks of the Franco-African army, risking a nameless grave in the sand with almost every hour, associated with the roughest riffraff of Europe, liable any day to be slain by the slash of an Arab *fissa*, and rewarded for twelve years' splendid service by the distinctive badge of a corporal. Any one of the friends of his former years, seeing him thus, would have said that he might as well be thrown at once into a pit in the sand, where the dead were piled twenty deep after a skirmish, to lie and rot, or be dug up by the talons of famished beasts, whichever might chance, as live thus in the obscurity, poverty, and semi-barbarism of an Algerian private's existence.

Yet it might be doubted if any life would have done for him what this had done: it might be questioned, if, judging a career not by its social position, but by its effect on character, any other would have been so well for him, or would equally have given steel and strength to the indolence and languor of his nature as this did. In his old world he would have lounged listlessly through fashionable seasons, and, in an atmosphere that encouraged his profound negligence of everything and his natural nil-admirari listlessness,

would have glided from refinement to effeminacy, and from lazy grace to blasé inertia.

The severity and the dangers of the campaigns with the French army had roused the sleeping lion in him, and made him as fine a soldier as ever ranged under any flag. He had suffered, braved, resented, fought, loved, hated, endured, and even enjoyed, here in Africa, with a force and a vividness that he had never dreamed possible in his calm, passionless, insouciant world of other days. He had known what the hunger of famine, what the torment of fever, what the agony of forbidden pride, what the wild delight of combat, were. He had known what it was to long madly for a stoup of water ; to lie raving, yet conscious, under the throes of gun-shot wounds ; to be forced to bear impassively words, for a tithe of which he could have struck across the mouth the chief who spoke them ; to find in a draught of wretched wine, after days of marching, a relish that he had never found in the champagnes and burgundies of the Guards' mess ; to love the dark Arab eyes, that smiled on him in his exile, as he had never loved those of any woman, and to suffer when the death-film gathered over them, as he had never thought it in him to suffer for any death or any life ; to feel every nerve thrill, and every vein glow, as with fierce, exultant joy, as the musketry pealed above the plains, and his horse pressed down on to the very mouths of the rifles, and the naked sabres flashed like the play of lightnings, and over the dead body of his charger, he fought

ankle deep in blood, with the Arabs circling like hawks, and their great blades whirling round him, catching the spears aimed at him with one hand, while he beat back their swords, blow for blow, with the other;—he had known all these, the desert passions; and, while outwardly they left him much the same in character, they changed him vitally. They developed him into a magnificent soldier—too true a soldier not to make thoroughly his the service he had adopted, not to, oftentimes, almost forget that he had ever lived under any other flag than that tricolour, which he followed and defended now.

The quaint heroic Norman motto of his ancestors carved over the gates of Royallieu—“*Cœur Vaillant Se Fait Royaume*”—verified itself in his case. Outlawed, beggared, robbed at a stroke of every hope and prospect, he had taken his adversity boldly by the beard, and had made himself at once a country and a kingdom among the brave, fierce, reckless, loyal hearts of the men, who came from north, south, east, and west, driven by every accident, and scourged by every fate, to fill up the battalions of North Africa.

As he went now, in the warmth of the after-glow, he turned up into the Rue Babazoum, and paused before the entrance of a narrow, dark, tumble-down, picturesque shop, half like a stall of a Cairo bazaar, half like a Jew's den in a Florentine alley.

A cunning, wizen head peered out at him from the gloom.

“Ah-ha! good even, Corporal Victor!”

Cecil, at the words, crossed the sill and entered.

"Have you sold any?" he asked. There was a slight constraint and hesitation in the words, as of one who can never fairly bend his spirit to the yoke of barter.

The little, hideous, wrinkled, dwarf-like creature, a trader in curiosities, grinned with a certain gratification, in disappointing this lithe-limbed, handsome Chasseur.

"Not one. The toys don't take. Daggers now, or anything made out of spent balls, or flissas one can tell an Arab story about, go off like wildfire; but your ivory bagatelles are no sort of use, M. le Caporal."

"Very well: no matter," said Cecil, simply, as he paused a moment before some delicate little statuettes and carvings—miniature things, carved out of a piece of ivory, or a block of marble, the size of a horse's hoof, such as could be picked up in dry river channels, or broken off stray boulders; slender crucifixes, wreaths of foliage, branches of wild fig, figures of Arabs and Moors, dainty heads of dancing-girls, and tiny chargers fretting like Bucephalus. They were perfectly conceived and executed. He had always had a D'Orsay-like gift that way, though, in common with all his gifts, he had utterly neglected all culture of it, until, cast adrift on the world, and forced to do something to maintain himself, he had watched the skill of the French soldiers at all such expedients to gain a few coins,

and had solaced many a dreary hour in barracks and under canvas with the toy-sculpture, till he had attained a singular art at it. He had commonly given Rake the office of selling them, and as commonly spent all the proceeds on all other needs save his own.

He lingered a moment, with regret in his eyes ; he had scarcely a sou in his pocket, and he had wanted some money sorely that night for a comrade dying of a lung-wound—a noble fellow, a French artist who, in an evil hour of desperation, had joined the army, with a poet's temper that made its hard colourless routine unendurable, and had been shot in the chest in a night-skirmish.

"You will not buy them yourself?" he asked, at length, the colour flushing his face ; he would not have pressed the question to save his own life from starving, but Léon Ramon would have no chance of a fruit or a lump of ice to cool his parched lips and still his agonised retching, unless he himself could get money to buy those luxuries that are too splendid and too merciful to be provided for a dying soldier, who knows so little of his duty to his country as to venture to die in his bed.

"Myself!" screeched the dealer, with a derisive laugh. "Ask me to give you my whole stock next, *M. le Galonné!* These trumperies will lie on hand for a year."

Cecil went out of the place without a word ; his

thoughts were with Léon Ramon, and the insolence scarce touched him. "How shall I get him the ice?" he wondered. "God! if I had only one of the lumps that used to float in our claret-cup!"

As he left the den, a military fairy, all gay with blue and crimson, like the fuchsia bell she most resembled, with a meerschaum in her scarlet lips and a world of wrath in her bright black eyes, dashed past him into the darkness within, and before the dealer knew or dreamt of her, tossed up the old man's little shrivelled frame like a shuttlecock, shook him till he shook like custards, flung him upward and caught him as if he were the hoop in a game of La Grace, and set him down bruised, breathless, and terrified out of his wits.

"Ah, *chénapan*!" cried Cigarette, with a volley of slang, utterly untranslatable, "that is how you treat your betters, is it? Miser, monster, crocodile, serpent! Harpagon was an angel to you." (She knew Harpagon because some of her Roumis chattered bits of Molière.) "He wanted the money and you refused it? Ah—h—h! son of Satan! you live on other men's miseries! Run after him—quick, and give him this, and this, and this, and this; and say you were only in jest, and the things were worth a Sheik's ransom. Stay! you must not give him too much or he will know it is not *you*—viper! Run quick, and breathe a word about me if you dare; one whisper only, and my Spahis shall cut your throat from

ear to ear. Off! or you shall have a bullet to quicken your steps; misers dance well when pistols play the minuet!"

With which exordium the little Amie du Drapeau shook her culprit at every epithet, emptied out a shower of gold and silver, just won at play, from the bosom of her uniform, forced it into the dealer's hands, hurled him out of his own door, and drew her pretty weapon with a clash from her sash.

"Run for your life!—and do just what I bid you, or a shot shall crash your skull in as sure as my name is Cigarette!"

The little old Jew flew as fast as his limbs would carry him, clutching the coins in his horny hands. He was terrified to a mortal anguish, and had not a thought of resisting or disobeying her; he knew the fame of Cigarette—as who did not? Knew that she would fire at a man as carelessly as at a cat, more carelessly in truth, for she favoured cats, saving many from going into the Zouaves' soup-caldrons, and favoured civilians not at all; and knew that at her rallying-cry all the sabres about the town would be drawn without a second's deliberation, and sheathed in anything or in anybody that had offended her, for Cigarette was, in her fashion, Generalissima of all the Regiments of Africa.

The dealer ran with all the speed of terror, and overtook Cecil, who was going slowly onward to the barracks.

"Are you serious?" he asked, in surprise at the

large amount, as the little Jew panted out apologies, entreaties, and protestations of his only having been in jest, and of his fervently desiring to buy the carvings at his own price, as he knew of a great collector in Paris to whom he needed to send them.

"Serious! Indeed am I serious, M. le Caporal," pleaded the curiosity-trader, turning his head in agonised fear to see if the vivandière's pistol was behind him. "The things will be worth a great deal to me where I shall send them, and though they are but bagatelles, what is Paris itself but one bagatelle? Pouf! they are all children there, they will love the toys. Take the money, I pray you, take the money!"

Cecil looked at him a moment; he saw the man was in earnest, and thought but little of his repentance and trepidation, for the citizens were all afraid of slighting or annoying a soldier.

"So be it. Thank you," he said, as he stretched out his hand and took the coins, not without a keen pang of the old pride that would not wholly be stilled, yet gladly for sake of the Chasseur dying yonder, growing delirious and wrenching the blood off his lungs, in want of one touch of the ice that was spoiled by the ton weight to keep cool the wines and the fish of M. le Marquis de Châteauroy. And he went onward to spend the gold his sculptures had brought on some mellow figs and some cool golden grapes, and some ice-chilled wines that should soothe a little of the pangs of dissolution, to his comrade, and bear

him back a moment, if only in some fleeting dream, to the vine shadows, and the tossing seas of corn, and the laughing sunlit sweetness, of his own fair country by the blue Biscayan waves.

"You did it? That is well. Now, see here—one word of me, now or ever after, and there is a little present that will come to you, hot and quick, from Cigarette," said the little Friend of the Flag, with a sententious sternness, that crushed each word deliberately through her tight-set pearly teeth. The unhappy Jew shuddered and shut his eyes as she held a bullet close to his sight, then dropped it with an ominous thud in her pistol barrel.

"Not a syllable, never a syllable," he stammered; "and if I had known you were in love with him, *ma belle*——"

A box on the ears sent him across his own counter.

"In love? Parbleu! I detest the fellow!" said Cigarette, with fiery scorn and as hot an oath.

"Truly? Then why give your Napoléons?——" began the bruised and stammering Israelite.

Cigarette tossed back her pretty head, that was curly and spirited and shapely as any thorough-bred spaniel's; a superb glance flashed from her eyes, a superb disdain sat on her lips.

"You are a Jew-trader; you know nothing of our code under the tricolour. We—*nous autres soldats*—are too proud not to aid even an enemy when he

is in the right, and France always arms for Justice !”

With which magnificent peroration she swept all the carvings—they were rightfully hers—off the table.

“They will light my cooking fire !” she said, contemptuously, as she vaulted lightly over the counter into the street, and pirouetted like a bit of fantoccini, that is wound up to waltz for ever, along the slope of the crowded Babazoum. All made way for her, even the mighty Spahis and the trudging Bedouin mules, for all knew that if they did not she would make it for herself, over their heads or above their prostrated bodies.

She whirled her way, like a gay-coloured top set humming down a road, through the divers motley groups, singing at the top of her sweet mirthful voice, for she was angry with herself ; and, for that, sang the more loudly the most wicked and *risqué* of her slang songs, that gave the morals of a Messalina in the language of a fish-wife, and yet had an inalienable, mischievous, contagious, dauntless French grace in it withal. Finally, she whirled herself into a dark deserted Moresco archway, a little out of the town, and dropped on a stone block, as a swallow, tired of flight, drops on to a bough.

“Is that the way I revenge myself ? Ah, bah ! I deserve to be killed ! When he called me unsexed—unsexed—unsexed !”—and with each repetition of the

infamous word, so bitter because vaguely admitted to be true, with her cheeks scarlet and her eyes aflame, and her hands clenched, she flung one of the ivory wreaths on to the pavement and stamped on it with her spurred heel until the carvings were ground into powdered fragments—stamped, as though it were a living foe, and her steel-bound foot were treading out all its life with burning hate and pitiless venom.

In the act her passion exhausted itself, as the evil of such warm, impetuous, tender natures will; she was very still, and looked at the ruin she had done with regret and a touch of contrition.

“It was very pretty—and cost him weeks of labour, perhaps,” she thought.

Then she took all the rest up, one by one, and gazed at them. Things of beauty had had but little place in her lawless young life; what she thought beautiful was a regiment sweeping out in full sunlight, with its eagles, and its colours, and its kettle-drums; what she held as music was the beat of the *réveillé* and the mighty roll of the great artillery; what made her pulse throb and her heart leap was to see two fine opposing forces draw near for the onslaught and thunder of battle. Of things of grace she had no heed, though she had so much grace herself; and her life, though full of colour, pleasure, and mischief, was as rough as one in most respects as any of her comrades'. These delicate artistic carvings were a revelation to her.

Here was the slender pliant spear of the river-reed; here the rich foliage of the wild fig-tree;

here the beautiful blossom of the oleander ; here fruit and flower, and vine-leaf, and the pendulous ears of millet, twined together in their ivory semblance till they seemed to grow beneath her hands—and those little hands looked so brown and so powder-stained beside the pure snow-whiteness of the wreaths ! She touched them reverently one by one ; all the carvings had their beauty for her, but those of the flowers had far the most. She had never noted any flowers in her life before, save those she strung together for the Zéphyr on the Jour de Mazagran. Her youth was a military ballad, rhymed vivaciously to the rhythm of the Pas de Charge ; but other or softer poetry had never by any chance touched her until now. Now that in her tiny, bronzed, war-hardened palms lay the white foliage, the delicate art-trifles of this Chasseur, who bartered his talent to get a touch of ice for the burning lips of his doomed comrade.

“He is an aristocrat—he has such gifts as this—and yet he is in the ranks, has no country, is so poor that he is glad of a Jew’s pittance, and must sell all this beauty to get a slice of melon for Léon Ramon !” she thought, while the silvery moon strayed in through a broken arch, and fell on an ivory coil of twisted lentiscus leaves and river grasses.

And, lost in a musing pity, Cigarette forgot her vow of vengeance.

CHAPTER V.

THE IVORY SQUADRONS.

THE *Chambrée* of the *Chasseurs* was bright and clean in the morning light ; but in common with all Algerian barrack-rooms as unlike the barrack-rooms of the ordinary army as *Cigarette*, with her *débonnaire* devilry, smoking on a gun-waggon, was unlike a trim Normandy *soubrette*, sewing on a bench in the *Tuileries* gardens.

Disorder reigned supreme ; but Disorder, although a dishevelled goddess, is very often a picturesque one, and more of an artist than her better-trained sisters ; and the disorder was brightened with a thousand vivid colours and careless touches that blent in confusion to enchant a painter's eyes. The room was crammed with every sort of spoil that the adventurous pillaging temper of the troopers could forage from Arab tents, or mountain caves, or river depths, or desert beasts and birds. All things, from tiger-skins to birds'-nests,

from Bedouin weapons to ostrich-eggs, from a lion's mighty coat to a tobacco-stopper chipped out of a morsel of deal, were piled together, pell-mell, or hung against the whitewashed walls, or suspended by cords from bed to bed. Everything that ingenuity and hardihood, prompted by the sharp spur of hunger, could wrest from the foe, from the country, from earth or water, from wild beasts or riven rock, were here in the midst of the soldiers' regimental pallets and regimental arms, making the *Chambrée* at once atelier, storehouse, workshop, and bazaar; while the men, cross-legged on their little hard couches, worked away with the zest of those who work for the few coins that alone will get them the food, the draught of wine, the hour's mirth and indulgence at the *estaminet*, to which they look across the long stern probation of discipline and manœuvre.

Skill, grace, talent, invention whose mother was necessity, and invention that was the unforced offshoot of natural genius, were all at work; and the hands that could send the naked steel down at a blow through turban and through brain could shape, with a woman's ingenuity, with a craftsman skill, every quaint device and dainty bijou from stone and wood, and many-coloured feathers, and mountain berries, and all odds and ends that chance might bring to hand, and that the women of Bedouin tribes or the tourists of North Africa might hereafter buy with a wondrous tale appended to them, racy and mar-

vellous as the Sapir slang and the military imagination could weave, to enhance the toy's value, and get a few coins more on them for their manufacture.

Ignorance jostled art, and *bizarrierie* ran hand in hand with talent, in all the products of the Chasseurs' extemporised studio; but nowhere was there ever clumsiness, and everywhere was there an industry, gay, untiring, accustomed to make the best of the worst; the workers laughing, chattering, singing, in all good-fellowship, while the fingers that gave the death-thrust held the carver's chisel, and the eyes that glared blood-red in the heat of battle twinkled mischievously over the meerschaum bowl, in whose grinning form some great chief of the Bureaucratic had just been sculptured in audacious parody.

In the midst sat Rake, tattooing with an eastern skill the skin of a great lion, that a year before he had killed in single combat in the heart of Oran, having watched for the beast twelve nights in vain, high perched on a leafy crest of rock, above a watercourse. While he worked, his tongue flew far and fast over the camp slang—the slangs of all nations came easy to him—in voluble conversation with the Chasseur next him, who was making a fan out of feathers that any Peeress might have signalled with at the Opera. “Crache-au-nez-d’la-Mort” was in high popularity with his comrades; and had said but the truth when he averred that he had never been so happy as under the tricolour. The officers pronounced him an incurably audacious “*pratique*,” he was always in

mischievous, and the regimental rules he broke through like a terrier through a gauze net; but they knew that when once the trumpets sounded *Boot and Saddle*, this yellow-haired dare-devil of an English fellow would be worth a score of more orderly soldiers, and that wherever his adopted flag was carried, there would he be, first and foremost, in everything save retreat. The English service had failed to turn *Rake* to account; the French service made no such mistake, but knew that though this British bull-dog might set his teeth at the leash and the lash, he would hold on like grim death in a fight, and live game to the last, if well handled.

Apart, at the head of the *Chambrée*, sat Cecil. The banter, the songs, the laughter, the chorus of tongues, went on unslackened by his presence. He had cordial sympathies with the soldiers: with those men who had been his fellows in adversity and danger; and in whom he had found, despite all their occasional ferocity and habitual recklessness, traits and touches of the noblest instincts of humanity. His heart was with them always, as his purse, and his wine, and his bread were alike shared ever among them. He had learned to love them well—these wild wolf-dogs, whose fangs were so terrible to their foes, but whose eyes would still glisten at a kind word, and who would give a staunch fidelity unknown to tamer animals.

Living with them, one of them in all their vicissitudes, knowing all their vices, but knowing also

all their virtues, owing to them many an action of generous nobility, and watching them in many an hour when their gallant self-devotion and their loyal friendships went far to redeem their lawless robberies and their ruthless crimes, he understood them thoroughly, and he could rule them more surely in their tempestuous evil, because he comprehended them so well in their mirth and in their better moods. When the grade of *sous-officier* gave him authority over them, they obeyed him implicitly because they knew that his sympathies were with them at all times, and that he would be the last to check their gaiety, or to punish their harmless indiscretions.

The warlike Roumis had always had a proud tenderness for their *Bel-à-faire-peur*, and a certain wondering respect for him; but they would not have adored him to a man, as they did, unless they had known that they might laugh without restraint before him, and confide any dilemma to him sure of aid, if aid were in his power.

The laughter, the work, and the clatter of conflicting tongues were at their height; Cecil sat, now listening, now losing himself in thought, while he gave the last touch to the carvings before him. They were a set of chessmen which it had taken him years to find materials for and to perfect; the white men were in ivory, the black in walnut, and were two opposing squadrons of French troops and of mounted Arabs. 'Beautifully carved, with every detail of costume rigid to truth, they were his master-

piece, though they had only been taken up at any odd ten minutes that had happened to be unoccupied during the last three or four years. The chessmen had been about with him in so many places and under canvas so long, from the time that he chipped out their first Zouave pawn, as he lay in the broiling heat of Oran prostrate by a dry brook's stony channel, that he scarcely cared to part with them, and had refused to let Rake offer them for sale, with all the rest of the carvings. Stooping over them, he did not notice the doors open at the end of the Chambrée until a sudden silence that fell on the babble and uproar round him made him look up; then he rose and gave the salute with the rest of his discomfited and awe-stricken troopers. Châteauroy with a brilliant party had entered.

The Colonel flashed an eagle glance round.

"Fine discipline! You shall go and do this pretty work at Beylick!"

The soldiers stood like hounds that see the lash; they knew that he was like enough to carry out his threat; though they were doing no more than they had always tacitly if not open permission to do. Cecil advanced, and fronted him.

"Mine is the blame, *mon Commandant!*"

He spoke simply, gently, boldly; standing with the ceremony that he never forgot to show to their chief, where the glow of African sunlight through the casement of the Chambrée fell full across his face, and his eyes met the dark glance of the "Black

Hawk" unflinchingly. He never heeded that there was a gay, varied, numerous group behind Châteauroy; visitors who were looking over the barrack; he only heeded that his soldiers were unjustly attacked and menaced.

The Marquis gave a grim significant smile, that cut like so much cord of the scourge.

"*Ça va san dire!* Wherever there is insubordination in the regiment the blame is very certain to be yours! Corporal Gaston, if you allow your *Chambrée* to be turned into the riot of a public fair you will soon find yourself degraded from the rank you so signally contrive to disgrace."

The words were far less than the tone they were spoken in, that gave them all the insolence of so many blows, as he swung on his heel and bent to the ladies of the party he escorted. Cecil stood mute; bearing the rebuke as it became a Corporal to bear his Commander's anger; a very keen observer might have seen that a faint flush rose over the sun-tan of his face, and that his teeth clenched under his beard, but he let no other sign escape him.

The very self-restraint irritated Châteauroy, who would have been the first to chastise the presumption of a reply, had any been attempted.

"Back to your place, sir!" he said, with a wave of his hand, as he might have waved back a cur. "Teach your men the first formula of obedience at any rate!"

Cecil fell back in silence. With a swift warning

glance at Rake,—whose mouth was working, and whose forehead was hot as fire, where he clenched his lion-skin, and longed to be once free, to pull his chief down as lions pull in the death-spring,—he went to his place at the farther end of the chamber and stood, keeping his eyes on the chess carvings, lest the control which was so bitter to retain should be broken if he looked on at the man who had been the curse and the antagonist of his whole life in Algeria.

He saw nothing and heard almost as little of all that went on around him ; there had been a flutter of cloud-like colour in his sight, a faint dreamy fragrance on the air, a sound of murmuring voices and of low laughter ; he had known that some guests or friends of the Marquis's had come to view the barracks, but he never even glanced to see who or what they were. The passionate bitterness of just hatred, that he had to choke down as though it were the infamous instinct of some nameless crime, was on him.

The moments passed, the hum of the voices floated to his ear, the ladies of the party lingered by this soldier and by that, buying half the things in the chamber, filling their hands with all the quaint trifles, ordering the daggers and the flissas and the ornamented saddles and the desert skins to adorn their chateaux at home ; and raining down on the troopers a shower of uncounted Napoléons until the Chasseurs, who had begun to think their trades would take them to Beylick, thought instead that they had drifted into dreams of El Dorado. He never looked up ; he heard

nothing, heeded nothing; he was dreamily wondering whether he should always be able so to hold his peace, and to withhold his arm, that he should never strike his tyrant down with one blow, in which all the opprobrium of years should be stamped out? A voice woke him from his reverie.

"Are those beautiful carvings yours?"

He looked up, and in the gloom of the alcove where he stood, where the sun did not stray, and two great rugs of various skins, with some conquered banners of Bedouins, hung like a black pall, he saw a woman's eyes resting on him; proud, lustrous eyes, a little haughty, very thoughtful, yet soft withal, as the deepest hue of deep waters. He bowed to her with the old grace of manner that had so amused and amazed the little vivandière.

"Yes, Madame, they are mine."

"Ah?—what wonderful skill!"

She took the White King, an Arab Sheik on his charger, in her hand, and turned to those about her, speaking of its beauties and its workmanship in a voice low, very melodious, ever so slightly languid, that fell on Cecil's ear like a chime of long-forgotten music. Twelve years had drifted by since he had been in the presence of a high-bred woman, and those lingering, delicate tones had the note of his dead past.

He looked at her; at the gleam of the brilliant hair, at the arch of the proud brows, at the dreaming, imperial eyes; it was a face singularly dazzling, im-

pressive, and beautiful at all times ; most so of all in the dusky shadows of the waving desert banners, and the rough, rude, barbaric life of the Caserne, where a *fille de joie* or a *cantinière* were all of her sex that was ever seen, and those—poor wretches!—were hardened, and bronzed, and beaten, and brandy-steeped out of all likeness to the fairness of women.

“You have an exquisite art. They are for sale?” she asked him : she spoke with the careless gracious courtesy of a *grande dame* to a Corporal of Chasseurs, looking little at him, much at the ivory Kings and their mimic hosts of Zouaves and Bedouins.

“They are at your service, Madame.”

“And their price?” She had been purchasing largely of the men on all sides as she had swept down the length of the *Chambrée*, and she drew out some French bank-notes as she spoke. Never had the bitterness of poverty smitten him as it smote him now when this young patrician offered him her gold ! Old habits vanquished ; he forgot who and where he now was ; he bowed as in other days he had used to bow in the circle of St. James’s.

“Is—the honour of your acceptance, if you will deign to give that.”

He forgot that he was not as he once had been. He forgot that he stood but as a private of the French Army before an aristocrate whose name he had never heard.

She turned and looked at him, which she had never done before, so absorbed had she been in the

chessmen, and so little did a Chasseur of the ranks pass into her thoughts. There was an extreme of surprise, there was something of offence, and there was still more of coldness in her glance; a proud, languid, astonished coldness of regard, though it softened slightly as she saw that he had spoken in all courtesy of intent.

She bent her graceful regal head.

"I thank you. Your very clever work can of course only be mine by purchase."

And with that she laid aside the White King among his little troop of ivory Arabs and floated onward with her friends. Cecil's face paled slightly under the mellow tint left there by the desert sun and the desert wind; he swept the chessmen into their walnut case and thrust them out of sight under his knapsack. Then he stood motionless as a sentinel, with the great leopard skins and Bedouin banners behind him, casting a gloom that the gold points on his harness could scarcely break in its heavy shadow, and never moved till the echo of the voices, and the cloud of the draperies, and the fragrance of perfumed laces, and the brilliancy of the staff officers' uniforms had passed away, and left the soldiers alone in their *Chambrée*. Those careless, cold words from a woman's lips had cut him deeper than the *matraque* could have cut him, though it had bruised his loins and lashed his breast; they showed all he had lost.

"What a fool I am still!" he thought, as he made his way out of the barrack-room. "I might have

fairly forgotten by this time that I ever had the rights of a gentleman."

So the carvings had won him one warm heart and one keen pang that day;—the vivandière forgave, the aristocrat stung him, by means of those snowy, fragile, artistic toys that he had shaped in lonely nights under canvas by ruddy picket-fires, beneath the shade of wild fig-trees, and in the stir and colour of Bedouin encampments.

"I must ask to be ordered out of the city," he thought, as he pushed his way through the crowds of soldiers and civilians. "Here, I get bitter, restless, impatient; here, the past is always touching me on the shoulder; here, I shall soon grow to regret, and to chafe, and to look back like any pining woman. Out yonder there, with no cares to think of but my horse and my troop, I am a soldier—and nothing else: so best. I shall be nothing else as long as I live. Pardieu, though! I don't know what one wants better: it is a good life, as life goes. One must not turn compliments to great ladies, that is all;—not much of a deprivation there. The chessmen are the better for that; her Maltese dog would have broken them all the first time it upset their table!"

He laughed a little as he went on smoking his *brûle-gueule*, the old carelessness, mutability, and indolent philosophies were with him still, and were still inclined to thrust away and glide from all pain as it arose. Though much of gravity and of thoughtfulness had stolen on him, much of insouciance remained; and

there were times when there was not a more reckless or a more nonchalant *lion* in all the battalions than "Bel-à-faire-peur." Under his gentleness there was "wild blood" in him still, and the wildness was not tamed by the fiery champagne-draught of the perilous, adventurous years he spent.

"I wonder if I shall *never* teach the Black Hawk that he may strike his beak in once too far?" he pondered, with a sudden darker, graver touch of musing; and involuntarily he stretched his arm out, and looked at the wrist, supple as Damascus steel, and at the muscles that were traced beneath the skin, as he thrust the sleeve up, clear, firm, and sinewy as any athlete's. He doubted his continence there, fast rein as he held all rebellion in, close shield as he bound to him against his own passions in the breastplate of a soldier's first duty—obedience.

He shook the thought off him as he would have shaken a snake. It had a terrible temptation—a temptation which he knew might any day overmaster him; and Cecil, who all through his life had certain inborn instincts of honour, which served him better than most codes or creeds served their professors, was resolute to follow the military religion of obedience enjoined in the Service that had received him at his needs, and to give no precedent in his own person that could be fraught with dangerous, rebellious allurements for the untamed, chafing, red-hot spirits of his comrades, for whom he knew insubordination would be ruin and death—whose one chance of reward, of

success, and of a higher ambition, lay in their implicit subordination to their chiefs, and their continuous resistance of every rebellious impulse.

Cecil had always thought very little of himself.

In his most brilliant and pampered days he had always considered in his own heart that he was a graceless fellow, not worth his salt, and had occasionally wondered, in a listless sort of way, why so useless a *bagatelle à la mode* as his own life was had ever been created. He thought much the same now; but following his natural instincts, which were always the instincts of a gentleman, and of a generous temper, he did, unconsciously, make his life of much value among its present comrades.

His influence had done more to humanise the men he was associated with than any preachers or teachers could have done. The most savage and obscene brute in the ranks with him caught something gentler and better from the "aristocrat." His refined habits, his serene temper, his kindly forbearance, his high instinctive honour, made themselves felt imperceptibly, but surely; they knew that he was as fearless in war, as eager for danger as themselves, they knew that he was no saint, but loved the smile of women's eyes, the flush of wines, and the excitation of gaming hazards as well as they did; and hence his influence had a weight that probably a more strictly virtuous man's would have strained for, and missed, for ever. The coarsest ruffian felt ashamed to make an utter beast of himself before the calm

eyes of the patrician. The most lawless *pratique* felt a lie halt on his lips when the contemptuous glance of his gentleman-comrade taught him that falsehood was poltroonery. Blasphemous tongues learnt to reign in their filthiness when this "*beau lion*" sauntered away from the picket-fire, on an icy night, to be out of hearing of their witless obscenities. More than once the weight of his arm and the slash of his sabre had called them to account in fiery fashion for their brutality to women or their thefts from the country people, till they grew aware that "*Bel-à-faire-peur*" would risk having all their swords buried in him rather than stand by to see injustice done.

And throughout his corps men became unconsciously gentler, juster, with a finer sense of right and wrong, and less bestial modes of pleasure, of speech, and of habit, because he was among them. Moreover, the keen-eyed desperadoes who made up the chief sum of his comrades saw that he gave unquestioning respect to a chief who made his life a hell; and rendered unquestioning submission under affronts, tyrannies, and insults, which, as they also saw, stung him to the quick, and tortured him as no physical torture would have done—and the sight was not without a strong effect for good on them. They could tell that he suffered under these as they never suffered themselves, yet he bore them and did his duty with a self-control and patience they had never attained.

Almost insensibly they grew ashamed to be beaten by him, and strove to grow like him as far as they

could. They never knew him drunk, they never heard him swear, they never found him unjust, even to a poverty-stricken *indigène*, or brutal, even to a *fille de joie*. Insensibly his presence humanised them. Of a surety, the last part Bertie dreamed of playing was that of a teacher to any mortal thing. Yet—here in Africa—it might reasonably be questioned if a second Augustine or François Xavier would ever have done half the good among the devil-may-care Roumis that was wrought by the dauntless, listless, reckless soldier, who followed instinctively the one religion which has no cant in its brave simple creed, and binds man to man in links that are true as steel—the religion of a gallant gentleman's loyalty and honour.

CHAPTER VI.

CIGARETTE EN CONSEIL ET CACHETTE.

“CORPORAL VICTOR, M. le Commandant desires you to present yourself at his *campagne* to-night, at ten precisely, with all your carvings;—above all, with the chessmen.”

The swift sharp voice of a young officer of his regiment wakened Cecil from his musing, as he went on his way down the crowded, tortuous, stifling street. He had scarcely time to catch the sense of the words, and to halt, giving the salute, before the Chasseur's skittish little Barbary mare had galloped past him, scattering the people right and left, knocking over a sweetmeat-seller, upsetting a string of maize-laden mules, jostling a venerable marabout on to an impudent little grisette, and laming an old Moor as he tottered to his mosque, without any apology for any of the mischief, in the customary insolence, which makes “Roumis” and “Bureau-

cratie" alike execrated by the indigenous populace with a detestation that the questionable benefits of civilised importations can do very little to counter-balance in the fiery breasts of the sons of the soil.

Cecil involuntarily stood still. His face darkened. All orders that touched on the service, even where harshest and most unwelcome, he had taught himself to take without any hesitation, till he now scarcely felt the check of the steel curb; but to be ordered thus like a lackey—to take his wares thus like a hawker!

"*Ah ma cantche!* We are soldiers, not traders—aren't we? You don't like that, M. Victor? You are no pedlar—eh? And you think you would rather risk being court-martialled and shot, than take your ivory toys for the Black Hawk's talons?"

Cecil glanced up in astonishment at the divination and translation of his thoughts, to encounter the bright falcon eyes of Cigarette looking down on him from a little oval casement above, dark as pitch within, and whose embrasure, with its rim of grey stone coping, set off like a picture-frame, with a heavy background of unglazed Rembrandt shadow, the piquant head of the Friend of the Flag, with her pouting, scarlet, mocking lips, and her mischievous challenging smile, and her dainty little gold-banded foraging-cap set on curls as silken and jetty as any black Irish setter's.

"*Bon jour, ma belle!*" he answered, with a little weariness, lifting his fez to her with a certain sense

of annoyance, that this young bohemian of the barracks, this child with her slang and her satire, should always be in his way like a shadow.

“*Bon jour, mon brave!*” returned Cigarette, contemptuously. “We are not so ceremonious as all that, in Algiers! Good fellow, you should be a chamberlain, not a corporal. What fine manners, *mon Dieu!*”

She was incensed, and piqued, and provoked. She had been ready to forgive him because he carved so wonderfully, and sold the carvings for his comrade at the hospital; she was holding out the olive-branch after her own petulant fashion; and she thought, if he had had any grace in him, he would have responded with some such florid compliment as those for which she was accustomed to box the ears of her admirers, and would have swung himself up to the coping, to touch, or at least try to touch, those sweet, fresh, crimson lips of hers, that were like a half-opened damask rose. Modesty is apt to go to the wall in camps, and poor little Cigarette’s notions of the great passion were very simple, rudimentary, and, certes, in no way coy. How should they be? She had tossed about with the army, like one of the tassels to their standards, blowing whichever way the breath of war floated her, and had experienced, or thought she had experienced, as many *affaires* as the veriest Don Juan among them, though her heart had never been much concerned in them, but had beaten scarce a shade quicker, if a lunge in a duel, or a shot from an

Indigène, had pounced off with her hero of the hour to Hades.

"Fine manners!" echoed Cecil, with a smile: "my poor child, have you been so buffeted about that you have never been treated with commonest courtesy?"

"Whew!" cried the little lady, blowing a puff of smoke down on him. "None of your pity for me, my *ci-devant*! Buffeted about? *Nom du diable*! do you suppose anybody ever did anything with *me* that I didn't choose? If you had as much power as I have in the army, Châteauroy would not send for you to sell your toys like a pedlar. You are a slave! I am a sovereign!"

With which she tossed back her graceful, spirited head, as though the gold band of her cap were the gold band of a diadem. She was very proud of her station in the Army of Africa, and glorified her privileges with all a child's vanity.

He listened, amused with her boastful supremacy; but the last words touched him with a certain pang just in that moment. He felt like a slave—a slave who must obey his tyrant, or go out and die like a dog.

"Well, yes," he said, slowly, "I am a slave, I fear. I wish a Bedouin flissa would cut my thralls in two."

He spoke jestingly, but there was a tinge of sadness in the words that touched Cigarette's changeful temper to contrition, and filled her with the same

compassion and wonder at him that she had felt when the ivory wreaths and crucifixes had laid in her hands. She knew she had been ungenerous—a crime dark as night in the sight of the little chivalrous soldier.

“*Tiens!*” she said, softly and waywardly, winding her way aright with that penetration and tact which, however unsexed in other things, Cigarette had kept thoroughly feminine. “That was but an idle word of mine: forgive it, and forget it. You are not a slave when you fight in the *fantasias*. Morbleu! they say to see you kill a man is beautiful—so workmanlike! And you would go out and be shot to-morrow, rather than sell your honour, or stain it—eh? Bah! while you know they should cut your heart out rather than make you tell a lie, or betray a comrade, you are no slave, my *galonné*; you have the best freedom of all. Take a glass of champagne? Prut-tut! how you look! Oh, the *demoiselles* with the silver necks are not barrack drink, of course; but I drink champagne always myself. This is M. le Prince’s. He knows I only take the best brands.”

With which Cigarette, leaning down from her casement, whose sill was about a foot above his head, tendered her peace-offering in a bottle of Cliquot, three of which, packed in her knapsack, she had carried off from the luncheon-table of a Russian Prince who was touring through Algiers, and who had half lost his Grand Ducal head after the bewitching,

dauntless, capricious, unattachable, unpurchasable, and coquettish little fire-eater of the Spahis, who treated him with infinitely more insolence and indifference than she would show to some battered old veteran, or some worn-out old dog, who had passed through the great Kabaila raids and battles.

"You will go to your Colonel's to-night?" she said, questioningly, as he drank the champagne, and thanked her—for he saw the spirit in which the gift was tendered—as he leaned against the half-ruined Moorish wall, with its blue and white striped awning spread over both their heads in the little street, whose crowds, chatter, thousand eyes, and incessant traffic no way troubled Cigarette, who had talked *argot* to monarchs undaunted, and who had been one of the chief sights in a hundred grand reviews ever since she had been perched on a gun-carriage at five years old, and paraded with a troop of horse artillery in the Champ de Mars, as having gone through the whole of Bugeaud's campaign, at which parade, by the way, being tendered sweetmeats by a famous General's wife, Cigarette had made the immortal reply, in lispng sabir: "*Madame, mes bonbons sont des boulets!*"

She repeated her question imperiously, as Cecil kept silent: "You will go to-night?"

He shrugged his shoulders. He did not care to discuss his Colonel's orders with this pretty little Bacchante.

"Oh, a chief's command, you know——"

"A fico for a chief!" retorted Cigarette, impatiently. "Why don't you say the truth? You are thinking you will disobey, and risk the rest!"

"Well, why not? I grant his right in barrack and field; but——"

He spoke rather to himself than her, and his thoughts, as he spoke, went back to the scene of the morning. He felt, with a romantic impulse that he smiled at even as it passed over him, that he would rather have half a dozen muskets fired at him in the death-sentence of a mutineer, than meet again the glance of those proud azure eyes sweep over him, in their calm indifference to a private of Chasseurs, their calm ignorance that he could be wounded or be stung.

"But?" echoed Cigarette, leaning out of her oval hole, perched in the quaint, grey, Morisco wall, parti-coloured with broken encaustics of varied hues. "*Chut, bon camarade!* that little word has been the undoing of the world ever since the world began. 'But' is a blank cartridge, and never did anything but miss fire yet. Shoot dead, or don't aim at all, whichever you like; but never make a *coup manqué* with 'but'! So you won't obey Châteauroy in this?"

He was silent again. He would not answer falsely, and he did not care to say his thoughts to her.

"'No,'" pursued Cigarette, translating his silence at her fancy, "you say to yourself; 'I am an aristo-

crat : I will not be ordered in this thing,'—you say. 'I am a good soldier : I will not be sent for like a hawker,'—you say. 'I was noble once : I will show my blood at last, if I die.' Ah!—you say that?"

He laughed a little as he looked up at her.

"Not exactly that ; but something as foolish, perhaps. Are you a witch, my pretty one?"

"Whoever doubted it, except you?"

She looked one, in truth, whom few men could resist, bending to him out of her owl's nest, with the flash of the sun under the blue awning brightly catching the sunny brown of her soft cheek and the cherry bloom of her lips, arched, pouting, and coquette. She set her teeth sharply, and muttered a hot, heavy *sacré*, or even something worse, as she saw that his eyes had not even remained on her, but were thoughtfully looking down the chequered light and colour of the street. She was passionate, she was vain, she was wayward, she was fierce as a little velvet leopard, as a handsome, brilliant plumaged hawk ; she had all the faults, as she had all the virtues, of the thorough Celtic race ; and, for the moment, she had an instinct, fiery, ruthless, and full of hate, to draw the pistol out of her belt, and teach him with a shot, crash through heart or brain, that girls who were "unsexed" could keep enough of the woman in them not to be neglected with impunity, and could lose enough of it to be able to avenge the negligence by a

summary vendetta. But she was a haughty little condottière in her fashion. She would not ask for what was not offered her, nor give a rebuke that might be traced to mortification. She only set her two rosebud lips in as firm a line of wrath and scorn as ever Cæsar's or Napoléon's moulded themselves into, and spoke in the curt, imperious, generalissimo fashion with which Cigarette before now had rallied a demoralised troop, reeling drunk and mad, away from a razzia.

"I am a witch? That is, I can put two and two together, and read men, though I don't read the alphabet. Well, one reading is a good deal rarer than the other. So you mean to disobey the Hawk to-night? I like you for that. But listen here—did you ever hear them talk of Marquise?"

"No."

"Parbleu!" swore the vivandière in her wrath, "you look on at a bamboula as if it were only a bear-cub dancing, and can only give one 'yes' and 'no,' as if one were a drummer-boy. Bah! are those your Paris courtesies?"

"Forgive me, *ma belle*! I thought you called yourself our comrade, and would have no 'fine manners!' There is no knowing how to please you."

He might have pleased her, simply and easily enough, if he had only looked up with a shade of interest to that most picturesque picture, bright as a pastel portrait that was hung above him in the old

tumble-down Moorish stonework. But his thoughts were with other things; and a love scene with this fantastic young Amazon did not attract him. The warm, ripe, mellow, little wayside-cherry hung directly in his path, with the sun on its bloom, and the free wind tossing it merrily; but it had no charm for him. He was musing rather on that costly, delicate, brilliant-hued, hothouse blossom, that could only be reached down by some rich man's hand, and grew afar on heights where never winter chills, nor summer tan, could come too rudely on it.

"Come, tell me, what is Marquise?—a kitten?" he went on, leaning his arm still on the sill of her embrasure, and willing to coax her out of her anger.

"A kitten!" echoed Cigarette, contemptuously. "You think me a child, I suppose?"

"Surely you are not far off it?"

"*Mon Dieu!* why, *I* was never a child in my life," retorted Cigarette, waxing sunny-tempered and confidential again, while she perched herself, like some gay-feathered mocking-bird on a branch, on the window-sill itself. "When I was two, I used to be beaten, like a Turco that pawns his musket; when I was three, I used to scrape up the cigar-ends the officers dropped about, to sell them again for a bit of black bread; when I was four, I knew all about Philippe Durren's escape from Beylick, and bit my tongue through, to say nothing, when my mother flogged me with a tringlo's mule-whip because I

would not tell, that she might tell again at the Bureau, and get the reward. A child?—diantre! before I was two feet high I had winged my first *Arbi*. He stole a rabbit I was roasting. Presto! how quick he dropped it when my ball broke his wrist like a twig."

And the Friend of the Flag laughed gaily at the recollection, as at the best piece of mirth with which memory could furnish her.

"But you asked about Marquise? Well, he was what you are, a hawk among carrion crows, a gentleman in the ranks. Dieu! how handsome he was! Nobody ever knew his real name, but they thought he was of Austrian breed, and we called him Marquise because he was so womanish white in his skin and so dainty in all his ways. Just like you! Marquise could fight, fight like a hundred devils; and—pouf!—how proud he was;—very much like you altogether! Now, one day something went wrong in the exercise-ground. Marquise was not to blame, but they thought he was; and an adjutant struck him—flick, flack, like that—across the face with a riding-switch. Marquise had his bayonet fixed—he belonged to the Zouaves—and before we knew what was up, crash the blade went through—through the breast-bone, and out at the spine—and the adjutant fell as dead as a cat, with the blood spouting out like a fountain. 'I come of a great race, that never took insult without giving back death,' was all that Mar-

quise said when they seized him, and brought him to judgment : and he would never say of what race that was. They shot him—ah, bah ! discipline must be kept—and I saw him with five great wounds in his chest, and his beautiful golden hair all soiled with the sand and the powder, lying there by the open grave, that they threw him into as if he were offal : and we never knew more of him than that.”

Cigarette’s radiant laugh had died, and her careless voice had sunk, over the latter words. As the little vivacious brunette told the tale of a nameless life, it took its eloquence from her, simple and brief as her speech was, and it owned a deeper pathos because the reckless young Bacchante of the *As de Pique* grew grave one moment while she told it. Then, grave still, she leaned her brown bright face nearer down from her oval hole in the wall.

“Now,” she whispered very low, “if you mutiny once they will shoot you just like Marquise, and you will die just as silent, like him.”

“Well,” he answered her slowly, “why not ? Death is no great terror ; I risk it every day for the sake of a common soldier’s rations, why should I not chance it for the sake and in the defence of my honour ? ”

“Bah ! men sell their honour for their daily bread all the world over ! ” said Cigarette, with the satire that had treble raciness from the slang in which she clothed it. “But it is not you alone. See here—one example set on your part, and half your regiment will

mutiny too. It is bitter work to obey the Black Hawk, and if you give the signal of revolt, three parts of your comrades will join you. Now what will that end in, *beau lion*—eh ?”

“Tell me; you are a soldier yourself, you say.”

“Yes! I am a soldier!” said Cigarette, between her tight-set teeth, while her eyes lightened, and her voice sank down into a whisper, that had a certain terrible meaning in it, like the first dropping of the scattered opening shots in the distance before a great battle commences; “and I have seen war, not holiday war—but war in earnest—war when men fall like hailstones, and tear like tigers, and choke like mad dogs with their throats full of blood and sand; when the gun-carriage wheels go crash over the writhing limbs, and the horses charge full gallop over the living faces, and the hoofs beat out the brains before death has stunned them senseless. Oh yes! I am a soldier, and I will tell you one thing I have seen. I have seen soldiers mutiny, a squadron of them, because they hated their chief and loved two of their sous-officiers; and I have seen the end of it all—a few hundred men, blind and drunk with despair, at bay against as many thousands, and walled in with four lines of steel and artillery, and fired on from a score of cannon-mouths—volley on volley like the thunder—till not one living man was left, and there was only a shapeless heaving moaning mass, with the black smoke over all. That is what I have seen; you will not make me see it again?”

Her face was very earnest, very eloquent, very dark and tender with thought; there was a vein of grave, even of intense feeling, that ran through the significant words to which tone and accent lent far more meaning than lay in their mere phrases; the little bohemian lost her insolence when she pleaded for her "children," her comrades; and the mischievous pet of the camp never treated lightly what touched the France that she loved, the France that alone of all things in her careless life she held in honour and reverence.

"You will not make me see it again?" she said, once more leaning out, with her eyes that were like a brown brook sparkling deep yet bright in the sun, fixed on him. "They would rise at your bidding, and they would be mowed down like corn. You will not?"

"Never! I give you my word."

The promise was from his heart. He would have endured any indignity, any outrage, rather than have drawn into ruin, through him, the fiery, fearless, untutored lives of the men, who marched and slept and rode and fought, and lay in the light of the picket-fires, and swept down through the hot sand storms on to the desert foe by his side. Cigarette stretched out her hand to him—that tiny brown hand, which, small though it was, had looked so burnt and so hard beside the delicate, fairy, ivory carvings of his workmanship—stretched it out with a frank, winning, childlike, soldierlike grace.

"C'est ça, tu es bon soldat !"

He bent over the hand she held to his in the courtesy natural with him to all her sex, and touched it lightly with his lips.

"Thank you, my little comrade," he said, simply, with the graver thought still on him that her relation and her entreaty had evoked, "you have given me a lesson that I shall not be quick to forget."

Cigarette was the wildest little bacchanal that ever pirouetted for the delight of half a score of soldiers in their shirt-sleeves and half drunk; she was the most reckless coquette that ever made the roll-call of her lovers range from prince-marshals to ploughboy conscripts; she had flirted as far and wide as a butterfly flirts with the blossoms it flutters on to through the range of a summer-day; she took kisses, if the giver of them were handsome, as readily as a child takes sweetmeats at Mardi Gras; and of feminine honour, feminine scruples, feminine delicacy, knew nothing, save by such very dim fragmentary instincts as nature still planted in scant growth amidst the rank soil and the pestilent atmosphere of camp-life. Her eyes had never sunk, her face had never flushed, her heart had never panted, for the boldest or the wildest wooer of them all, from M. le Duc's Lauzun-esque blandishments, to Pouffer-de-Rire's or Miou-Miou's rough overtures; she had the coquetry of her nation with the audacity of a boy. Now only, for the first time, Cigarette coloured hotly at the grave, graceful,

distant salute, so cold and so courteous, which was offered her in lieu of the rude and boisterous familiarities to which she was accustomed; and drew her hand away with what was, to the shame of her soldierly hardihood and her barrack tutelage, very nearly akin to an impulse of shyness.

"*Dame ! Ne me donnez de la gabatine !*"* I am not a court lady, *bon-zig !*" she cried, hastily, almost petulantly, to cover the unwonted and unwelcome weakness; while, to make good the declaration and revindicate her military renown, she balanced herself lightly on the stone ledge of her oval hole and sprang with a young wild-cat's easy vaulting leap over his head and over the heads of the people beneath, on to the ledge of the house opposite, a low-built wine-shop, whose upper story nearly touched the leaning walls of the old Moorish buildings in which she had been perched. The crowd in the street below looked up amazed and aghast at that bound from casement to casement as she flew over their heads like a blue-and-scarlet-winged bird of Oran; but they laughed as they saw who it was.

"It is Cigarette!" growled a Turco Indigène. "Ah-ah! the devil, for a certainty, must have been her father!"

"To be sure!" cried the Friend of the Flag, looking from her elevation; "he is a very good father, too, and I don't tease him like his sons the priests!"

* "Stuff! Don't humbug me!"

But I have told him to take *you*, Ben Arsli, the next time you are stripping! a dead body; so look out; he won't have to wait long."

The discomfited Indigène hustled his way with many an oath through the laughing crowd as best he might, and Cigarette, with an airy pirouette on the wine-shop's roof that would have done honour to any opera boards, and was executed as carelessly, twenty feet above earth, as if she had been a pantomime-dancer all her days, let herself down by the awning, hand over hand like a little *mousse* from the harbour, jumped on to a forage-waggon that was just passing full trot down the street, and disappeared, standing on the piles of hay, and singing to the driving *tringlos*' unutterable delight the stanzas of Béranger's "*Infidélités de Lisette*;" her lithe slender miniature form, with its flash of gold on the breast, and its strip of rich scarlet in the fluttering sash, rising out against the blue and burning sky, the glare of the white walls, and the dusky glow and movement of the ebbing and flowing crowd.

Cecil looked after her with a certain touch of pity for her in him.

"What a gallant boy is spoilt in that little Amazon!" he thought; the quick flush of her face, the quick withdrawal of her hand he had not noticed; she had not much interest for him—scarcely any, indeed—save that he saw she was pretty, with a mignonne mischievous face, that all the sun-tan of Africa and all

the wild life of the Caserne could not harden or debase. But he was sorry a child so bright and so brave should be turned into three parts a trooper as she was, should have been tossed up on the scum and filth of the lowest barrack-life, and should be doomed in a few years' time to become the yellow, battered, foul-mouthed, vulture-eyed camp-follower that premature old age would surely render the darling of the tricolour, the pythoness of the *As de Pique*.

Cigarette was making scorn of her doom of Sex, dancing it down, drinking it down, laughing it down, burning it out in tobacco fumes, drowning it in tumbling cascades of wine, trampling it to dust under the cancan by her little brass-bound boots, mocking it away with her slang jests and her Theresa songs, and her devil-may-care audacities, till there was scarce a trace of it left in this prettiest and wildest little scamp of all the Army of Africa. But strive to kill it how she would, her sex would have its revenge one day and play Nemesis to her.

She was bewitching now; bewitching, though she had no witchery for him, in her youth. But when the bloom should leave her brown cheeks, and the laughter die out of her lightning glance, the womanhood she had defied would assert itself, and avenge itself, and be hideous in the sight of the men who now loved the tinkling of those little spurred feet, and shouted with applause to hear the reckless barrack-blasphemies ring their mirth from that fresh

mouth which was now like a bud from a damask rose-branch, though even now it steeped itself in wine, and sullied itself with oaths and seared itself with smoke, and had never been touched from its infancy with any kiss that was innocent, not even with its mother's.

And there was a deep tinge of pity for her in Cecil's thoughts as he watched her out of sight, and then strolled across to the café opposite to finish his cigar beneath its orange-striped awning. The child had been flung upward, a little straw floating in the gutter of Paris iniquities; a little foam-bell bubbling on the sewer waters of barrack-vice; the stick had been her teacher, the baggage-waggon her cradle, the camp-dogs her playfellows, the *caserne* oaths her lullaby, the *guidons* her sole guiding-stars, the *razzia* her sole fête-day: it was little marvel that the bright, bold, insolent little Friend of the Flag had nothing left of her sex save a kitten's mischief and a coquette's archness. It said much rather for the straight fair sunlit instincts of the untaught nature, that Cigarette had gleaned, even out of such a life, two virtues that she would have held by to the death, if tried; a truthfulness that would have scorned a lie as only fit for cowards, and a loyalty that cleaved to France as a religion.

Cecil thought that a gallant boy was spoiled in this eighteen-year-old brunette of a campaigner; he might have gone further, and said that a hero was lost.

"Voilà!" said Cigarette between her little teeth.

She stood in the glittering Algerine night, brilliant with a million stars, and balmy with a million flowers, before the bronze trellised gate of the villa on the Sahel, where Châteauroy when he was not on active service—which chanced rarely, for he was one of the finest soldiers and most daring chiefs in Africa—indemnified himself with the magnificence that his private fortune enabled him to enjoy, for the unsparing exertions and the rugged privations that he always shared willingly with the lowest of his soldiers. It was the grandest trait in the man's character that he utterly scorned the effeminacy which many commanders provided for their table, their comfort, and their gratification whilst campaigning, and would commonly neither take himself nor allow to his officers any more indulgence on the march than his troopers themselves enjoyed. But his villa on the Sahel was a miniature palace; it had formerly been the harem of a great Rais, and the gardens were as enchanting as the interior was, if something florid, still as elegant as Paris art and Paris luxury could make it; for ferocious as the Black Hawk was in war, and well as he loved the chase and the slaughter, he did not disdain, when he had whetted beak and talons to satiety, to smoothe his ruffled plumage in downy nests and under caressing hands.

To-night the windows of the pretty, low, snow-white, far-stretching building were lighted and open,

and through the wilderness of cactus, myrtle, orange, citron, fuchsia, and a thousand flowers that almost buried it under their weight of leaf and blossom, a myriad of lamps were gleaming like so many glow-worms beneath the foliage, while from a cedar grove some slight way farther out, the melodies and overtures of the best military bands in Algiers came mellowed, though not broken, by the distance, and the fall of the bubbling fountains. Cigarette looked and listened, and her gay brown face grew duskily warm with wrath.

"Ah, bah!" she muttered, as she pressed her pretty lips to the lattice-work. "The men die like murrained sheep in the hospital, and get sour bread tossed to them as if they were pigs, and are thrashed if they pawn their muskets for a stoup of drink when their throats are dry as the desert—and *you* live like a *coq en pâte*!* Morbleu! what fools the people are to fight, and toil, and get their limbs broken, and have their brains dashed out by spent balls, that M. le Maréchal may send home a grand story with his own name flaring in letters a yard long on the placards, and M. le Colonel give his fêtes with stars and ribbons on his breast, while those who won the battle lie rotting in the sand!"

Cigarette was a resolute little democrat; she had loaded the carbines behind the barricade in an émeute in Paris before she was ten years old, and was not

* In clover.

seldom in the perplexity of conflicting creeds when her loyalty to the tricolour and the guidons smote with a violent clash on her love for the populace and their liberty. She was given, however, usually to reconciling the dilemma with all her sex's illogical ingenuity, and so far thoroughly carried out her republicanism that she boxed a Prince's ear without ceremony when one tried to subjugate her, and never by any chance veiled the sun of her smiles to her "children" the troopers—not even when she was tired to death after a burning march across leagues on leagues of locust-wasted country, or had spent half the night, after a skirmish, dressing wounds, soothing fever, seeking out the dying men who lay scattered on the outskirts of the field of carnage, with a magic and a sweetness, and a patience that seemed rather fitting for the gentle *Sœurs Grises* than for the wayward, mischievous, insolent young reveller of the *As de Pique*.

She looked a moment longer through the gilded scroll-work; then, as she had done once before, thrust her pistols well within her sash that they should not catch upon the boughs, and pushing herself through the prickly cactus hedge, impervious to anything save herself or a Barbary marmoset, twisted with marvellous ingenuity through the sharp-pointed leaves and the close barriers of spines, and launched herself with inimitable dexterity on to the other side of the cacti. Cigarette had too often played a game

at spying and reconnoitring for her regiments, and played it with a cleverness that distanced even the most *rusé* of the Zéphyrs, not to be able to do just whatever she chose, in taking the way she liked, and lurking unseen at discretion.

She crossed the breadth of the grounds under the heavy shade of arbutus-trees with a hare's fleetness, and stood a second looking at the open windows and the terraces that lay before them, brightly lighted by the summer moon and by the lamps that sparkled among the shrubs. Then down she dropped, as quickly, as lightly, as a young setter down charging among the ferns, into a shower of rhododendrons, whose rose and lilac blossoms shut her wholly within them like a fairy enclosed in bloom. The good fairy of one life there she was assuredly, though she might be but a devil-may-care, audacious, careless little feminine Belphégor and military Asmodeus.

"Ah!" she said, quickly and sharply, with a deep-drawn breath. The single ejaculation was at once a menace, a tenderness, a whirlwind of rage, a volume of disdain, a world of pity. It was intensely French, and the whole nature of Cigarette was in it.

Yet all she saw was a small and brilliant group sauntering to and fro before the open windows, after dinner, listening to the bands, which, through dinner, had played to them, and laughing low and softly; and, at some distance from them, beneath the shade of a cedar, the figure of a Corporal of Chasseurs,

calm, erect, motionless, as though he were the figure of a soldier cast in bronze. The scene was simple enough, though very picturesque; but it told, by its vivid force of contrast, a whole history to Cigarette.

"A true soldier!" she muttered, where she lay among the rhododendrons, while her eyes grew very soft, as she gave the highest word of praise that her whole range of language held. "A true soldier! How he keeps his promise! But it must be bitter."

She looked awhile, very wistfully, at the Chasseur, where he stood under the Lebanon boughs; then her glance swept bright as a hawk's over the terrace, and lighted with a prescient hatred on the central form of all—a woman's. There were two other great ladies there; but she passed them, and darted with unerring instinct on that proud, fair, patrician head, with its haughty stag-like carriage and the crown of its golden hair.

Cigarette had seen *grandes dames* by the thousand, though never very close; seen them in Paris, when they came to look on at a grand review; seen them in their court attire, when the Guides had filled the Carrousel on some palace ball night, and lined the Cour des Princes, and she had bewitched the officers of the guard into letting her pass in to see the pageantry. But she had never felt for those *grandes dames* anything save a considerably contemptuous

indifference. She had looked on them pretty much as a war-worn powder-tried veteran looks on the curled dandy of some fashionable home-staying corps. She had never realised the difference betwixt them and herself, save in so far as she thought them useless butterflies, worth nothing at all, and laughed as she triumphantly remembered how she could shoot a man like any *Tirailleur*, and break in a colt like any rough-rider.

Now, for the first time, the sight of one of those aristocrats smote her with a keen hot sting of heart-burning jealousy. Now, for the first time, the little Friend of the Flag looked at all the nameless graces of rank with an envy that her sunny, gladsome, generous nature had never before been touched with—with a sudden perception, quick as thought, bitter as gall, wounding, and swift, and poignant, of what this womanhood, that he had said she herself had lost, might be in its highest and purest shape.

“Unsexed—he said I was unsexed,” she mused, while her teeth clenched on the ruby fulness of her lips, and her heart swelled, half with impotent rage, half with unconfessed pain. For the first time, looking on this imperial foreign beauty, sweeping so slowly and so idly along there in the Algerian starlight, she understood all that he had missed, all that he had meant, when he had used that single word, for which she had vowed on him her vengeance and the vengeance of the Army of Africa.

"If those are the women that he knew before he came here, I do not wonder that he never cared to watch even my *bamboula*," was the latent, unacknowledged thought that was so cruel to her: the consciousness—which forced itself in on her, while her eyes jealously followed the perfect grace of the one in whom instinct had found her rival—that, while she had been so proud of her recklessness, and her devilry, and her trooper's slang, and her deadly skill as a shot, she had only been something very worthless, something very lightly held by those who liked her for a ribald jest, and a guinguette dance, and a Spahis' supper of headlong riot and drunken mirth.

The mood did not last. She was too brave, too fiery, too dauntless, too untamed. The dusky angry flush upon her face grew deeper, and the passion gathered more stormily in her eyes, while she felt the pistol-butts in her sash, and laughed low to herself, where she lay stretched under her flowery nest.

"Bah! she would faint, I dare say, at the mere sight of these," she thought, with her old disdain, "and would stand fire no more than a gazelle! They are only made for summer-day weather, those dainty, gorgeous, silver pheasants. A breath of war, a touch of tempest, would soon beat them down—crash!—with all their proud crests drooping!"

Like many another, Cigarette underrated what she had no knowledge of, and depreciated an antagonist

the measure of whose fence she had no power to gauge.

Crouched there among the rhododendrons, she lay as still as a mouse, moving nearer and nearer, though none would have told that so much as a lizard even stirred under the blossoms, until her ear, quick and unerring as an Indian's, could detect the sense of the words spoken by that group, which so aroused all the hot ire of her warrior's soul and her democrat's impatience. Châteauroy himself was bending his fine dark head towards the patrician on whom her instinct of sex had fastened her hatred.

"You expressed your wish to see my Corporal's little sculptures again, Madame," he was murmuring now, as Cigarette got close enough under her flower shadows to catch the sense of the words. "To hear was to obey with me. He waits your commands yonder."

"Mille tonneres! It was *you*, was it, brought him here?" muttered the Friend of the Flag to herself, with the passion in her burning more hotly against that "silver pheasant," whose delicate train was sweeping the white marbles of Châteauroy's terraces, and whose reply, "with fashion, not with feeling, softly freighted," she lost, though she could guess what it had been, when a lacquey crossed the lawn, and summoned the Chasseur from his waiting-place beneath the cedars.

Cecil obeyed, passed up the terrace stairs, and stood before his Colonel, giving the salute; the shade

of some acacias still fell across him, whilst the party he fronted were in all the glow of a full Algerian moon, and of the thousand lamps among the belt of flowers and trees. Cigarette gave another sharp deep-drawn breath, and lay as mute and motionless as she had done before then among the rushes of some dried brook's bed, scanning a hostile Kabyl camp, when the fate of a handful of French troops had rested on her surety and her caution.

Châteauroy spoke with a carelessness of a man to a dog, turning to his Corporal.

"Victor, Madame la Princesse honours you with the desire to see your toys again. Spread them out."

The savage authority of his general speech was softened for sake of his guest's presence, but there was a covert tone in the words that made Cigarette murmur to herself:

"If he forget his promise, I will forgive him!"

Cecil had not forgotten it; neither had he forgotten the lesson that this fair *aristocrate* had read him in the morning. He saluted his chief again, set the chess-box down upon the ledge of the marble balustrade and stood silent, without once glancing at the fair and haughty face that was more brilliant still in the African starlight than it had been in the noon sun of the Chasseurs' *Chambre*. Courtesy was forbidden him as insult from a Corporal to a nobly born beauty; he no more quarrelled with the decree than

with other inevitable consequences, inevitable degradations, that followed on his entrance as a private under the French flag. He had been used to the impassable demarcations of Caste, he did not dispute them more now that he was without, than he had done when within, their magic pale.

The carvings were passed from hand to hand as the Marquis's six or eight guests, listlessly willing to be amused in the warmth of the evening after their dinner, occupied themselves with the ivory chess armies, cut with a skill and a finish worthy a Roman studio. Praise enough was awarded to the art, but none of them remembered the artist who stood apart, grave, calm, with a certain serene dignity that could not be degraded because others chose to treat him as the station he filled gave them fit right to do.

Only one glanced at him with a touch of wondering pity, softening her pride; she who had rejected the gift of those mimic squadrons.

"You were surely a sculptor, once?" she asked him, with that graceful distant kindness which she might have shown some Arab outcast.

"Never, Madame."

"Indeed! Then who taught you such exquisite art?"

"It cannot claim to be called art, Madame."

She looked at him with an increased interest: the accent of his voice told her that this man, whatever he might be now, had once been a gentleman.

"Oh yes; it is perfect of its kind. Who was your master in it?"

"A common teacher, Madame—Necessity."

There was a very sweet gleam of compassion in the lustre of her dark dreaming eyes.

"Does necessity often teach so well?"

"In the ranks of our army, Madame, I think it does;—often indeed much better."

Châteauroy had stood by and heard, with as much impatience as he cared to show before guests whose rank was precious to the man who had still weakness enough to be ashamed that his father's brave and famous life had first been cradled under the thatch roof of a little posting-house.

"Victor knows that neither he nor his men have any right to waste their time on such trash," he said, carelessly; "but the truth is, they love the canteen so well that they will do anything to add enough to their pay to buy brandy."

She whom he had called Madame la Princesse looked with a doubting surprise at the sculptor of the white Arab King she held.

"That man does not carve for brandy," she thought.

"It must be a solace to many a weary hour in the barracks to be able to produce such beautiful trifles as these," she said aloud. "Surely you encourage such pursuits, Monsieur?"

"Not I," said Châteauroy, with a dash of his camp

tone that he could not withhold. "There are but two arts or virtues for a trooper to my taste—fighting and obedience."

"You should be in the Russian service, M. de Châteauroy," said the lady, with a smile, that, slight as it was, made the Marquis's eyes flash fire.

"Almost I wish I had been," he answered her; "men are made to keep their grades there, and privates who think themselves fine gentlemen receive the lash they merit."

"How he hates his Corporal!" thought Miladi, while she laid aside the White King once more.

"Nay," interposed Châteauroy, recovering his momentary self-abandonment, "since you like the bagatelles, do me honour enough to keep them."

"Oh no, I offered your soldier his own price for them this morning, and he refused any."

Châteauroy swung round.

"*Ah, sacrifiant!* you dared refuse your bits of ivory when you were honoured by an offer for them."

Cecil stood silent; his eyes met his chief's steadily; Châteauroy had seen that look when his Chasseur had bearded him in the solitude of his tent, and demanded back the Pearl of the Desert.

The Princess glanced at both; then she stooped her elegant head slightly to the Marquis.

"Do not blame your Corporal unjustly through me, I pray you. He refused any price, but he offered them to me very gracefully as a gift, though

of course it was not possible that I should accept them so."

"The man is the most insolent *larron* in the service," muttered her host, as he motioned Cecil back off the terrace. "Get you gone, sir, and leave your toys here, or I will have them broken up by a hammer."

The words were low, that they should not offend the ears of the great ladies who were his listeners, but they were coarsely savage in their whispered command, and the Princess heard them.

"He has brought his Chasseur here only to humiliate him," thought Miladi with the same thought that flashed through the mind of the little Friend of the Flag where she hid among her rhododendrons. Now the dainty aristocrat was very proud, but she was not so proud but that justice was stronger in her than pride, and a noble generous temper mellowed the somewhat too cold and languid negligence of one of the fairest and haughtiest women that ever adorned a court. She was too generous not to rescue any one who suffered through her the slightest injustice, not to interfere when through her any misconception lighted on another; she told with her sex's rapid perception and sympathy that the man, whom Châteauroy addressed with the brutal insolence of a bully to his disobedient dog, had once been a gentleman, though he now held but the rank of a sous-officier in the Algerian Cavalry, and she saw that he

suffered all the more keenly under an outrage he had no power to resist because of that enforced serenity, that dignity of silence and of patience, with which he stood before his tyrant.

"Wait," she said, moving a little towards them, while she let her eyes rest on the carver of the sculptures with a grave compassion, though she addressed his chief. "You wholly mistake me. I laid no blame whatever on your Corporal. Let him take the chessmen back with him; I would on no account rob him of them. I can well understand that he does not care to part with such masterpieces of his art; and that he would not appraise them by their worth in gold only shows that he is a true artist, as doubtless also he is a true soldier."

The words were spoken with a gracious courtesy, the clear cold tone of her habitual manner just marking in them still the difference of caste between her and the man for whom she interceded, as she would equally have interceded for a dog who should have been threatened with the lash because he had displeased her. That very tone struck a sharper blow to Cecil than the insolence of his commander had power to deal him. His face flushed a little; he lifted his cap to her with a grave reverence, and moved away:

"I thank you, Madame. Keep them, if you will so far honour me."

The words reached only her ear; in another instant

he had passed away down the terrace steps, obedient to his chief's dismissal.

"Ah! have no kind scruples in keeping them, Madame," Châteauroy laughed to her, as she still held in her hand, doubtfully, the White Sheik of the chess Arabs; "I will see that Bel-à-faire-peur, as they call him, does not suffer by losing these trumperies, which, I believe, old Zist-et-Zest, a veteran of ours and a wonderful carver, had really far more to do with producing than he. You must not let your gracious pity be moved by such fellows as these troopers of mine; they are the most ingenious rascals in the world, and know as well how to produce a dramatic effect in your presence as they do how to drink and to swear when they are out of it."

"Very possibly," she said, with an indolent indifference; "but that man was no actor, and I never saw a gentleman if he have not been one."

"Like enough," answered the Marquis. "I believe many 'gentlemen' come in our ranks who have fled their native countries, and broken all laws from the Decalogue to the Code Napoléon. So long as they fight well, we don't ask their past criminalities. We cannot afford to throw away a good *sabreur* because he has made his own land too hot to hold him."

"Of what country is your Corporal, then?"

"I have not an idea. I imagine his past must have been something very black indeed, for the

slightest trace of it has never, that I know of, been allowed to let slip from him. He encourages the men in every insubordination, buys their favour with every sort of stage trick, thinks himself the finest gentleman in the whole brigades of Africa, and ought to have been shot long ago if he had had his real deserts."

She let her glance dwell on him with a contemplation that was half contemptuous amusement, half unexpressed dissent.

"I wonder he has not been, since *you* have the ruling of his fate," she said, with a slight smile lingering about the proud rich softness of her lips.

"So do I."

There was a gaunt, grim, stern significance in the three monosyllables that escaped him unconsciously; it made her turn and look at him more closely.

"How has he offended you?" she asked.

Châteauroy laughed off the question.

"In a thousand ways, Madame. Chiefly because I received my regimental training under one who followed the traditions of the Armies of Egypt and the Rhine, and have, I confess, little tolerance, in consequence, of a rebel who plays the martyr, and a soldier who is too effeminate an idler to do anything except attitudinise in interesting situations to awaken sympathy."

She listened with something of distaste upon her face where she still leaned against the marble balustrade toying with the ivory Bedouins.

"I am not much interested in military discussions," she said, coldly, "but I imagine—if you will pardon me for saying so—that you do your Corporal some little injustice here. I should not fancy he 'affects' anything, to judge from the very good tone of his manners. For the rest, I shall not keep the chessmen without making him fitting payment for them; since he declines money, you will tell me what form that had better take to be of real and welcome service to a Chasseur d'Afrique."

Châteauroy, more incensed than he chose or dared to show, bowed courteously, but with a grim ironic smile.

"If you really insist, give him a Napoléon or two whenever you see him; he will be very happy to take it and spend it *au cabaret*, though he played the aristocrat to-day. But you are too good to him; he is one of the very worst of my *pratiques*, and you are as cruel to me in refusing to deign to accept my trooper's worthless bagatelles at my hands."

She bent her superb head silently, whether in acquiescence or rejection he could not well resolve with himself, and turned to the staff-officers, among them the heir of a princely semi-royal French House, who surrounded her, and sorely begrudged the moments she had given to those miniature carvings and the private soldier who had wrought them. She was no coquette; she was of too imperial a nature, had too lofty a pride, and was too difficult to charm or to enchain; but those meditative, brilliant, serene eyes

had a terrible gift of wakening without ever seeking love, and of drawing without ever recompensing homage.

Couched down among her rose-hued covert, Cigarette had watched and heard, her teeth set tightly, her breath coming and going swiftly, her hand clenched close on the butts of her pistols, fiery curses, with all the infinite variety in cursing of a barrack *répertoire*, chasing one another in hot fast mutterings off those bright lips, that should have known nothing except a child's careless and innocent song.

"*Comme elle est belle! comme elle est belle!*" she whispered every now and then to herself, with a new, bitter, ferocious meaning in the whisper that had, with all its hate, something pathetic too. She had never looked at a beautiful high-bred woman before, holding them in gay satirical disdain as mere *papillons rouants* who could not prime a revolver and fire it off to save their own lives, if ever such need arose; a depth of ignorance that was, to the vivandière's view, the *ne plus ultra* of crassitude and impotence. But now she studied one through all the fine, quickened, unerring instincts of jealousy; and there is no instinct in the world that gives such thorough appreciation of the very rival it reviles. She saw the courtly negligence, the regal grace, the fair brilliant loveliness, the delicious serene languor, of a pure "*aristocrate*" for the very first time to note them, and they made her heart sick with a new and deadly

sense ; they moved her much as the white delicate carvings of the lotus-lilies and the lentiscus-leaves had done ; they, like the carvings, showed her all she had missed. She dropped her head suddenly like a wounded bird, and the racy vindictive camp-oaths died off her lips. She thought of herself as she had danced that mad bacchic *bamboula* amidst the crowd of shouting, stamping, drunken, half-infuriated soldiery, and for the moment she hated herself more even than she hated that patrician yonder.

"I know what he meant *now* !" she pondered, and her spirited, sparkling, brunette face was dark and weary, like a brown sun-lightened brook over whose radiance the heavy shadow of some broad-spread eagle's wings hovers, hiding the sun.

She looked once, twice, thrice, more inquiringly, enviously, thirstily ; then, as the band under the cedars rolled out their music afresh, and light laughter echoed to her from the terrace, she turned and wound herself back under the cover of the shrubs, not joyously and mischievously as she had come, but almost as slowly, almost as sadly, as a hare that the greyhounds have coursed drags itself through the grasses and ferns.

Once through the cactus hedge her old spirit returned ; she shook herself angrily with petulant self-scorn ; she swore a little, and felt that the fierce familiar words did her good like brandy poured down her throat ; she tossed her head like a colt that rebels

against the gall of the curb; then, fleet as a fawn, she dashed down the moonlit road at top most speed. "Diantre! she can't do what I do!" she thought.

And she ran the faster, and sang a drinking-song of the Spahis all the louder, because still at her heart a dull pain was aching.

CHAPTER VII.

CIGARETTE EN CONDOTTIERA.

CIGARETTE always went fast. She had a bird-like way of skimming her ground that took her over it with wonderful swiftness, all the tassels, and ribbon-knots, and sashes with which her uniform was rendered so gay and so distinctive fluttering behind her, and her little military boots, with the bright spurs twinkling, flying over the earth too lightly for a speck of dust, though it lay thick as August suns could parch it, to rest upon her. Thus she went now, along the lovely moonlight, singing her drinking-song so fast and so loud that had it been any other than this young fire-eater of the African squadrons it might have been supposed she sang out of fear and bravado—two things, however, that never touched Cigarette; for she exulted in danger as friskily as a young salmon exults in the first fresh, crisp, tumbling crest of a

sea-wave, and would have backed up the most vain-glorious word she could have spoken with the cost of her life, had need been. Suddenly, as she went, she heard a shout on the still night air—very still now, that the lights, and the melodies, and the laughter of Châteauroy's villa lay far behind, and the town of Algiers was yet distant, with its lamps glittering down by the sea.

The shout was, "*A moi, Roumis! Pour la France!*" And Cigarette knew the voice, ringing melodiously and calmly still, though it gave the sound of alarm.

"*Cigarette au secours!*" she cried in answer; she had cried it many a time over the heat of battle-fields, and when the wounded men in the dead of the sickly night writhed under the knife of the camp-thieves. If she had gone like the wind before, she went like the lightning now.

A few yards onward she saw a confused knot of horses and of riders struggling one with another in a cloud of white dust, silvery and hazy in the radiance of the moon.

The centre figure was Cecil's; the four others were Arabs, armed to the teeth and mad with drink, who had spent the whole day in drunken debauchery, pouring in raki down their throats until they were wild with its poisonous fire, and had darted head-long all abreast down out of the town overriding all that came in their way, and lashing their poor beasts with their sabres till the horses' flanks ran blood. Just as they neared Cecil, they had knocked

aside and trampled over a worn-out old colon, of age too feeble for him to totter in time from their path. Cecil had reined up and shouted to them to pause; they, inflamed with the perilous drink, and senseless with the fury which seems to possess every Arab once started in a race neck to neck, were too blind to see, and too furious to care, that they were faced by a soldier of France, but rode down on him at once, with their curled sabres flashing round their heads. His horse stood the shock gallantly, and he sought at first only to parry their thrusts and to cut through their stallions' reins; but the latter were chain bridles, and only notched his sword as the blade struck them, and the former became too numerous and too savagely dealt to be easily played with in *carte* and *tierce*. The Arabs were dead-drunk, he saw at a glance, and had got the blood-thirst upon them; roused and burning with brandy and *raki*, these men were like tigers to deal with; the words he had spoken they never heard, and their horses hemmed him in powerless, whilst their steel flashed on every side;—they were not of the tribe of the Khalifa.

If he struck not, and struck not surely, he saw that a few moments more of that moonlight night were all that he would live. He wished to avoid bloodshed, both because his sympathies were always with the conquered tribes, and because he knew that every one of these quarrels and combats between the vanquisher and the vanquished served further to

widen the breach, already broad enough, between them. But it was no longer a matter of choice with him, as his shoulder was grazed by a thrust which, but for a swerve of his horse, would have pierced to his lungs; and the four riders, yelling like madmen, forced the animal back on its haunches and assaulted him with breathless violence. He swept his own arm back, and brought his sabre down straight through the sword-arm of the foremost; the limb was cleft through as if the stroke of an axe had severed it, and, thrice infuriated, the Arabs closed in on him. The points of their weapons were piercing his harness when, sharp and swift, one on another, three shots hissed past him; the nearest of his assailants fell stone dead, and the others, wounded and startled, loosed their hold, and tore off down the lonely road, while the dead man's horse, shaking his burden from him out of the stirrups, followed them at a headlong gallop through a cloud of dust.

"That was a pretty cut through the arm; better had it been through the throat. Never do things by halves, *ami Victor*," said Cigarette, carelessly, as she thrust her pistols back into her sash, and looked, with the tranquil appreciation of a connoisseur, on the brown, brawny, naked limb, where it lay severed on the sand, with the hilt of the weapon still hanging in the sinewy fingers. Cecil threw himself from his saddle and gazed at her in bewildered amazement; he had thought those sure, cool, death-dealing shots had come from some Spahis or Chasseur.

"I owe you my life!" he said, rapidly. "But—good God!—you have shot the fellow dead——"

Cigarette shrugged her shoulders with a contemptuous glance at the Bedouin's corpse.

"To be sure—I am not a bungler."

"Happily for me, or I had been where he lies now. But wait—let me look; there may be breath in him yet."

Cigarette laughed, offended and scornful, as with the offence and scorn of one whose first science was impeached.

"*Pas si bête!* Look and welcome; but if you find any life in that Arbi, make a laugh of it before all the army to-morrow."

She was at her fiercest. A thousand new emotions had been roused in her that night, bringing pain with them, that she bitterly resented; and, moreover, this child of the Army of Africa caught fire at the flame of battle with instant contagion, and had seen slaughter around her from her first infancy.

Cecil, disregarding her protest, stooped and raised the fallen Bedouin. He saw at a glance that she was right; the lean, dark, lustful face was set in the rigidity of death; the bullet had passed straight through the temples.

"Did you never see a dead man before?" demanded Cigarette, impatiently, as he lingered;—even in this moment he had more thought of this *Arbico* than he had of her!

He laid the Arab's body gently down, and looked

at her with a glance that, rightly or wrongly, she thought had a rebuke in it.

"Very many. But—it is never a pleasant sight. And they were in drink; they did not know what they did."

"Pardieu! What divine pity! Good powder and ball were sore wasted, it seems; you would have preferred to lie there yourself, it appears. I beg your pardon for interfering with the preference."

Her eyes were flashing, her lips very scornful and wrathful. This was his gratitude!

"Wait, wait," said Cecil, rapidly, laying his hand on her shoulder, as she flung herself away. "My dear child, do not think me ungrateful. I know well enough I should be a dead man myself had it not been for your gallant assistance. Believe me, I thank you from my heart."

"But you think me 'unsexed' all the same! I see, *beau lion!*"

The word had rankled in her; she could launch it now with telling reprisal.

He smiled; but he saw that this phrase, which she had overheard, had not alone incensed, but had wounded her.

"Well, a little, perhaps," he said, gently. "How should it be otherwise? And, for that matter, I have seen many a great lady look on and laugh her soft cruel laughter while the pheasants were falling by hundreds, or the stags being torn by the hounds.

They called it 'sport;' but there was not much difference—in the mercy of it, at least—from your war. And they had not a tithe of your courage."

The answer failed to conciliate her; there was an accent of compassion in it that ill suited her pride, and a lack of admiration that was not less new and unwelcome.

"It was well for you I *was* unsexed enough to be able to send an ounce of lead into a drunkard!" she pursued, with immeasurable disdain. "If I had been like that dainty aristocrat down there—pardieu! it had been worse for you. I should have screamed, and fainted, and left you to be killed whilst I made a *tableau*. Oh-hé, that is to be 'feminine,' is it not?"

"Where did you see that lady?" he asked, in some surprise.

"Oh! I was there!" answered Cigarette, with a toss of her head southward to where the villa lay. "I went to see how you would keep your promise."

"Well, you saw I kept it."

She gave her little teeth a sharp click like the click of a trigger.

"Yes. And I would have forgiven you if you had broken it."

"Would you? I should not have forgiven myself."

"Ah! you are just like Marquise. And you will end like him."

"Very probably."

She knitted her pretty brows, standing there in his path, with the pistols thrust in her sash, and her hands resting lightly on her hips as a good workman rests after a neatly finished job, and her dainty fez set half on one side on her brown tangled curls, while upon them the intense lustre of the moonlight streamed, and in the dust, well-nigh at their feet, lay the gaunt white-robed form of the dead Arab, with the olive saturnine face turned upward to the stars.

"Why did you give those chessmen to that silver pheasant?" she asked him, abruptly.

"Silver pheasant?"

"Yes. See how she sweeps—sweeps—sweeps so languid, so brilliant, so useless—bah! Why did you give them?"

"She admired them. It was not much to give."

"Diantre! You would not have given them to a daughter of the people."

"Why not?"

"Why not? Oh-hé! Because her hands would be hard, and brown, and coarse, not fit for those ivory puppets; but *Miladi's* are white like the ivory, and cannot soil it. She will handle them so gracefully, for five minutes; and then buy a new toy, and let her lapdog break yours!"

"Like enough." He said it with his habitual gentle temper, but there was a shadow of pain in the words. The chessmen had become in some sort like living things to him, through long association;

he had parted from them not without regret, though, for the moment, courtesy and generosity of instinct had overcome it; and he knew that it was but too true how, in all likelihood these trifles of his art, that had brought him many a solace and been his companion through many a lonely hour, would be forgotten by the morrow, where he had bestowed them, and at best put aside in a cabinet to lie unnoticed among bronzes or porcelain, or be set on some boudoir-table to be idled with in the mimic warfare that would serve to cover some listless flirtation.

Cigarette, quick to sting, but as quick to repent using her sting, saw the regret in him; with the rapid uncalculating liberality of an utterly unselfish and intensely impulsive nature, she hastened to make amends by saying what was like gall on her tongue in the utterance.

"*Tiens!*" she said, quickly. "Perhaps she will value them more than that. I know nothing of the aristocrats—not I! When you were gone, she championed you against the Black Hawk. She told him that if you had not been a gentleman before you came into the ranks, she never had seen one. *Ma cante!* she spoke well if you had but heard her."

"She did!"

She saw his glance brighten as it turned on her in a surprised gratification.

"Well! What is there so wonderful?"

Cigarette asked it with a certain petulance and doggedness, taking a namesake out of her breast-

pocket, biting its end off, and striking a fusee. A word from this aristocrat was more welcome to him than a bullet that had saved his life !

Her generosity had gone very far, and, like most generosity, got nothing for its pains.

He was silent a few moments, tracing lines in the dust with the point of his scabbard. Cigarette, with the cigar in her mouth, stamped her foot impatiently.

"Corporal Victor ! are you going to dream there all night ? What is to be done with this dog of an Arbico ?"

She was angered by him ; she was in the mood to make herself seem all the rougher, fiercer, naughtier, and more callous. She had shot the man — pouf ! what of that ? She had shot men before, as all Africa knew. She would defend a half-fledged bird, a terrified sheep, a worn-out old cur ; but a man ! Men were the normal and natural food for pistols and rifles, she considered. A state of society in which fire-arms had been unknown was a thing Cigarette had never heard of, and in which she would have contumeliously disbelieved if she had been told of it.

Cecil looked up from his musing ; he thought what a pity it was this pretty graceful French kitten was such a bloodthirsty young panther at heart.

"I scarcely know what to do," he answered her, doubtfully. "Put him across my saddle, poor wretch, I suppose : the fray must be reported."

"Leave that to me," said Cigarette, decidedly and

with a certain haughty patronage. "I shot him; I will see the thing gets told right. It might be awkward for you; they are growing so squeamish about the *Roumis* killing the natives. Draw him to one side there, and leave him. The crows will finish his affair."

The coolness with which this handsome child disposed of the fate of what, a moment or two before, had been a sentient, breathing, vigorous frame, sent a chill through her hearer, though he had been seasoned by a decade of slaughter.

"No," he said, briefly. "Suspicion might fall on some innocent passer-by. Besides—he shall have decent burial."

"Burial for an Arbi—faugh!" cried Cigarette, in derision. "Parbleu, M. Bel-à-faire-peur, I have seen hundreds of *our* best lascars lie rotting on the plains with the birds' beaks at their eyes and the jackals' fangs in their flesh. What was good enough for them is surely good enough for him. You are an eccentric fellow—you——"

He laughed a little.

"Time was when I should have begged you not to call me any such 'bad form!' Eccentric! I am not genius enough for that."

"Eh?"—she did not understand him. "Well, you want that carrion poked into the earth, instead of lying atop of it. I don't see much difference myself. I would like to be in the sun as long as I

could, I think, dead or alive. Ah! how odd it is to think one will be dead some day—never wake for the réveillé—never hear the cannon or the caissons roll by—never stir when the trumpets sound the charge, but lie there dead—dead—dead—while the squadrons thunder above one's grave! Droll, eh?"

A momentary pathos softened her voice (which could melt and change into a wonderful music), where she stood in the glistening moonlight. That the time would ever come when her glad laughter would be hushed, when her young heart would beat no more, when the bright, abundant, passionate blood would bound no longer through her veins, when all the vivacious, vivid, sensuous charms of living would be ended for her for ever, was a thing that she could no better bring home to her than a bird that sings in the light of the sun could be made to know that the time would come when its little melodious throat would be frozen in death, and give song never more.

The tone touched him; made him think less of her as a dare-devil boy, as a reckless child-soldier, and more of her as what she was, than he had done before: he touched her almost caressingly.

"*Pauvre enfant!* I hope that day will be very distant from you. And yet—how bravely you risked death for me just now!"

Cigarette, though accustomed to the lawless loves of the camp, flushed ever so slightly at the mere caress of his hand.

"*Chut!* I risked nothing!" she said, rapidly. "As for death—when it comes, it comes. Every soldier carries it in his wallet, and it may jump out on him any minute. I would rather die young than grow old. Pardi! age is nothing else but death that is *conscious*."

"Where do you get your wisdom, little one?"

"Wisdom? Bah! living is learning. Some people go through life with their eyes shut, and then grumble there is nothing to see in it! Well—you want that Arbi buried? What a fancy! Look you, then; stay by him, since you are so fond of him, and I will go and send some men to you with a stretcher to carry him down to the town. As for reporting, leave that to me; I shall tell them *I* left you on guard. That will square things, if you are late at the barrack."

"But that will give you so much trouble, Cigarette."

"Trouble? Morbleu! Do you think I am like that silver pheasant yonder? Lend me your horse, and I shall be in the town in ten minutes!"

She vaulted, as she spoke, into the saddle; he laid his hand on the bridle, and stopped her.

"Wait! I have not thanked you half enough, my brave little champion. How am I to show you my gratitude?"

For a moment the bright, brown, changeful face, that could look so fiercely scornful, so sunnily radiant, so tempestuously passionate, and so tenderly child-like, in almost the same moment, grew warm as the

warm suns that had given their fire to her veins; she glanced at him almost shyly, while the moonlight slept lustrously in the dark softness of her eyes; there was an intense allurement in her in that moment—the allurement of a woman's loveliness, bitterly as she disdained a woman's charms. It might have told him, more plainly than words, how best he could reward her for the shot that had saved him; yet, though a man on whom such beguilement usually worked only too easily and too often, it did not now touch him. He was grateful to her; but, despite himself, he was cold to her; despite himself, the life which that little hand that he held had taken so lightly made it the hand of a contrade to be grasped in alliance, but never the hand of a mistress to steal to his lips and to lie in his breast.

Her rapid and unerring instinct made her feel that keenly and instantly; she had seen too much passion not to know when it was absent. The warmth passed off her face, her teeth clenched, she shook the bridle out of his hold.

“Take gratitude to Miladi there! She will value fine words; I set no count on them. I did no more for you than I have done scores of times for my Spahis. Ask them how many I have shot with my own hand!”

In another instant she was away like a sirocco, a whirlwind of dust that rose in the moonlight marking her flight as she rode full gallop down to Algiers.

"A kitten with the tigress in her," thought Cecil, as he seated himself on a broken pile of stone to keep his vigil over the dead Arab. It was not that he was callous to the generous nature of the little Friend of the Flag, or that he was insensible either of the courage that beat so dauntlessly in her pulses, or of the piquant picturesque grace that accompanied even her wildest actions; but she had nothing of her sex's charm for him. He thought of her rather as a young soldier than as a young girl. She amused him as a wayward, bright, mischievous, audacious boy might have done; but she had no other interest for him. He had given her little attention; a waltz, a cigar, a passing jest, were all he had bestowed on the little *lionne* of the Spahis corps; and the deepest sentiment she had ever awakened in him was an involuntary pity—pity for this flower which blossomed on the polluted field of war, and under the poison-dropping branches of lawless crime. A flower bright-hued, sun-fed, glancing with the dews of youth now, when it had just unclosed, in all its earliest beauty but already soiled and tainted by the bed from which it sprang, and doomed to be swept away with time, scentless and loveless, down the rapid noxious current of that broad black stream of vice on which it now floated so heedlessly.

Even now, his thoughts drifted from her almost before the sound of the horse's hoofs had died where he sat on a loose pile of stones, with the lifeless limbs of the Arab at his feet.

"Who was it in my old life that she is like?" he was musing. It was the deep-blue, dreaming, haughty eyes of "Miladi" that he was bringing back to memory, not the brown mignon face that had been so late close to his in the light of the moon.

Meanwhile, on his good grey Cigarette rode like a true Chasseur herself. She was used to the saddle, and would ride a wild desert colt without stirrup or bridle, balancing her supple form now on one foot now on the other on the animal's naked back, while they flew at full speed, with a skill and address that would have distanced the best heroines of manège and hippodrome. Not so fantastically, but full as speedily, she dashed down into the city, scattering all she met with right and left, till she rode straight up to the barracks of the Chasseurs d'Afrique. At the entrance, as she reined up, she saw the very person she wanted, and signed him to her as carelessly as if he were a conscript, instead of that powerful officer, François Vireflau, captain and adjutant.

"Holà!" she cried, as she signalled him; Cigarette was privileged all through the army, and would have given the *langue verte* to the Emperor himself, had she met him. "Adjutant Vireflau, I come to tell you a good story for your *folios matricules*. There is your Corporal there—*le beau Victor*—has been attacked by four drunken dogs of Arbicos, dead drunk and four against one. He fought them superbly; but he would only parry, not thrust, because he knows how

strict the rules are about dealing with the scoundrels—even when they are murdering you, parbleu ! He has behaved splendidly. I tell you so. And he was so patient with these dogs that he would not have killed one of them. But I did ; shot one straight through the brain—a beautiful thing—and he lies on the Oran road now. Victor would not leave him, for fear some passer-by should be thought guilty of a murder ; so I came on to tell you, and ask you to send some men up for the jackal's body. Ah ! he is a fine soldier, that Bel-à-faire-peur of yours. Why don't you give him a step—two steps—three steps ? Diantre ! It is not like France to leave him a corporal !”

Vireflau listened attentively—a short, lean, black-visaged campaigner, who yet relaxed into a grim half-smile as the vivandière addressed him with that air as of a generalissimo addressing a subordinate, which always characterised Cigarette the more strongly the higher the grade of her companion or opponent.

“ Always eloquent, pretty one !” he growled. “ Are you sure he did not begin the fray ?”

“ *Ma canteke !* Don't I tell you the four Arabs were like four devils ? They knocked down an old colon, and Bel-à-faire-peur tried to prevent their doing more mischief, and they set on him like so many wild-cats. He kept his temper wonderfully ; he always tries to preserve order ; you can't say so

much of your ruffraff, Captain Vireflau, commonly ! Here ! this is his horse. Send some men to him ; and mind the thing is reported fairly, and to his credit, to-morrow."

With which command, given as with the air of a commander-in-chief, in its hauteur and its nonchalance, Cigarette vaulted off the charger, flung the bridle to a soldier, and was away and out of sight before François Vireflau had time to consider whether he should laugh at her caprices, as all the army did, or resent her insolence to his dignity. But he was a good-natured man, and, what was better, a just one ; and Cigarette had judged rightly that the tale she had told would weigh well with him to the credit side of his Corporal ; and would not reach his Colonel in any warped version that could give pretext for any fresh exercise of tyranny over "Bel-à-faire-peur" under the title of "discipline."

"Dieu de Dieu !" thought his champion, as she made her way through the gay-lit streets. "I swore to have my vengeance on him. It is a droll vengeance—to save his life, and plead his cause with Vireflau ! No matter ! one could not look on and let a set of Arbicos kill a good *lascar* of France, and the thing that is just must be said, let it go as it will against one's grain. Public Welfare before Private Pique !"

A grand and misty generality which consoled Cigarette for an abandonment of her sworn revenge,

which she felt was a weakness utterly unworthy of her, and too much like that inconsequent weather-cock, that useless insignificant part of creation, those objects of her supreme derision and contempt, those frivolous trifles which she wondered the good God had ever troubled himself to make—namely, “*Les Femmes*.”

“Holà, Cigarette!” cried the Zouave Tata, leaning out of a little casement of the *As de Pique* as she passed it. “*A la bonne heure, ma belle!* Come in; we have the devil’s own fun here——”

“No doubt!” retorted the Friend of the Flag. “It would be odd if the master-fiddler would not fiddle for his own!”

Through the window, and over the sturdy shoulders in their canvas shirt of the hero Tata, the room was visible, full of smoke, through which the lights glimmered like the sun in a fog, reeking with bad wines, crowded with laughing bearded faces, and the battered beauty of women revellers, while on the table, singing with a voice Mario himself could not have rivalled for exquisite sweetness, was a slender Zouave, gesticulating with the most marvellous pantomime, while his melodious tones rolled out the obscenest and wittiest ballad that ever was carolled in a guinguette.

“Come in, my pretty one!” entreated Tata, stretching out his brawny arms. “You will die of laughing if you hear *Gris-Gris* to-night. Such a song!”

“A pretty song, yes, for a pigsty!” said Ciga-

rette, with a glance into the chamber, as she shook his hand off her, and went on down the street. A night or two before a new song from Gris-Gris, the best tenor in the whole army, would have been paradise to her, and she would have vaulted through the window at a single bound into the pandemonium. Now, she did not know why, she found no charm in it.

And she went quietly home to her little straw-bed in her garret, and curled herself up like a kitten to sleep; but for the first time in her young life sleep did not come readily to her, and when it did come, for the first time found a restless sigh upon her laughing mouth, as she murmured, dreaming :
“ *Comme elle est belle ! Comme elle est belle !* ”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MISTRESS OF THE WHITE KING.

"FIGHTING in the Kabaila, life was well enough; but here!" thought Cecil as, earlier awake than those of his Chambrée, he stood looking down the lengthy narrow room where the men lay asleep along the bare floor.

Tired as over-worked cattle, and crouched or stretched like worn-out homeless dogs, they had never wakened as he had noiselessly harnessed himself, and he looked at them with that interest in other lives that had come to him through adversity; for if misfortune had given him strength, it had also given him sympathy.

They were of marvellously various types—those sleepers brought under one roof by fates the most diverse. Close beside a huge and sinewy brute of an Auvergnat, whose coarse bestial features and massive bull's head were fitter for a galley-slave than a sol-

dier, were the symmetrical limbs and the oval delicate face of a man from the Valley of the Rhône. Beneath a canopy of flapping tawny wild-beast skins, the spoils of his own hand, was flung the naked torso of one of the splendid peasants of the Sables d'Olonne ; one steeped so long in blood and wine and alcohol, that he had forgotten the blue bright waves that broke on the western shores of his boyhood's home, save when he muttered thirstily in his dreams of the cool sea, as he was muttering now. Next him, curled, dog-like, with its round black head meeting its feet, was a wiry frame on which every muscle was traced like network, and the skin burnt black as jet under twenty years of African sun. The midnight streets of Paris had seen its birth, the thieves' quarter had been its nest ; it had no history, it had almost no humanity ; it was a perfect machine for slaughter, no more—who had ever tried to make it more ?

Farther on lay, sleeping fitfully, a boy of scarcely more than seventeen, with rounded cheek and fair white limbs like a child's, whose uncovered chest was delicate as a girl's, and through whose long brown lashes tears in his slumber were stealing as his rosy mouth murmured, "*Mère ! mère ! Pauvre mère !*" He was a young conscript taken from the glad vine-country of the Loire, and from the little dwelling up in the rock beside the sunny brimming river, and half-buried under its grape-leaves and coils, that was dearer to him than is the palace to its heir. There were many others beside these ; and Cecil looked at

them with those weary speculative meditative fancies which, very alien to his temperament, stole on him occasionally in the privations and loneliness of his existence here—loneliness in the midst of numbers, the most painful of all solitude.

Life was bearable enough to him in the activity of campaigning, in the excitement of warfare; there were times even when it yielded him absolute enjoyment, and brought him interests more genuine and vivid than any he had known in his former world. But, in the monotony and the confinement of the barrack routine, his days were often intolerable to him. Morning after morning he rose to the same weary round of duty, the same series of petty irritations, of physical privations, of irksome repetitions, to take a toss of black rough coffee, and begin the day knowing it would bring with it endless annoyances without one gleam of hope. Rose to spend hours on the exercise-ground in the glare of a burning sun, railed at if a trooper's accoutrement were awry, or an insubordinate scoundrel had pawned his regulation-shirt; to be incessantly witness of tyrannies and cruelties he was powerless to prevent, and which he continually saw undo all he had done, and render men desperate whom he had spent months in endeavouring to make contented; to have as the only diversions for his few instants of leisure loathsome pleasures that disgusted the senses they were meant to indulge, and that brought him to scenes of low debauchery from which all the old fastidious instincts of his delicate

luxurious taste recoiled: with such a life as this he often wondered regretfully why, out of the many Arab swords that had crossed his own, none had gone straight to his heart; why out of the many wounds that had kept him hovering on the confines of the grave, none had ever brought him the end and the oblivion of death.

Had he been subject to all the miseries and personal hardships of his present career, but had only owned the power to command, to pardon, to lead, and to direct, as Alan Bertie before him had done with his Irregular Cavalry in the Indian plains, such a thought would never have crossed him; he was far too thorough a soldier not *then* to have been not only satisfied, but happy. What made his life in the barracks of Algiers so bitter were the impotency, the subjection, the compelled obedience to a bidding that he knew often capricious and unjust as it was cruel, which were so unendurable to his natural pride, yet to which he had hitherto rendered undeviating adhesion and submission, less for his own sake than for that of the men around him, who, he knew, would back him in revolt to the death, and be dealt with, for such loyalty to him, in the fashion that the vivandière's words had pictured with such terrible force and truth.

"Is it worth while to go on with it? Would it not be the wiser way to draw my own sabre across my throat?" he thought, as the brutalised companionship in which his life was spent struck on him all the

more darkly because, the night before, a woman's voice and a woman's face had recalled memories buried for twelve long years.

But, after so long a stand-up fight with fate, so long a victory over the temptation to let himself drift out in an opium-sleep from the world that had grown so dark to him, it was not in him to give under now. In his own way he had found a duty to do here, though he would have laughed at any one who should have used the word "duty" in connexion with him. In his own way, amidst these wild spirits, who would have been blown from the guns' mouths to serve him, he had made good the "*Cœur Vaillant Se Fait Royaume*" of his House. And he was, moreover, by this time, a French soldier at heart and in habit, in almost all things, though the English gentleman was not dead in him under the harness of a *Chasseur d'Afrique*.

This morning he roused the men of his *Chambrée* with that kindly gentleness which had gone so far in its novelty to attach their liking; went through the customary routine of his post with that exactitude and punctuality of which he was always careful to set the example; made his breakfast off some wretched onion-soup and a roll of black bread; rode fifty miles in the blazing heat of the African day at the head of a score of his *chasses-maraîs* on convoy duty, bringing in escort a long string of maize-waggons from the region of the Kabaila, which, without such guard, might have been swooped down on and borne off by some predatory tribe; and returned, jaded, weary, parched with

thirst, scorched through with heat, and covered with white dust, to be kept waiting in his saddle, by his Colonel's orders, outside the barrack for three-quarters of an hour, whether to receive a command or a censure he was left in ignorance.

When the three-quarters had passed, he was told M. le Commandant had gone long ago, and did not require him !

Cecil said nothing.

Yet he reeled slightly as he threw himself out of saddle ; a nausea and a giddiness had come on him. To have passed nigh an hour motionless in his stirrups, with the skies like brass above him, whilst he was already worn with riding from sunrise well-nigh to sunset, with little to appease hunger and less to slake thirst, made him, despite himself, stagger dizzily under a certain sense of blindness and exhaustion as he dismounted.

The Chasseur who had brought him the message caught his arm eagerly.

" Are you hurt, *mon Caporal* ? "

Cecil shook his head. The speaker was one known in the regiment as Petit Picpon, who had begun life as a *gamin* of Paris, and now bade fair to make one of the most brilliant of the soldiers of Africa. Petit Picpon had but one drawback to his military career—he was always in insubordination ; the old *gamin* dare-devilry was not dead in him, and never would die ; and Petit Picpon accordingly was perpetually a hero in the field and a ragamuffin in the times of peace. Of

course he was always arrayed against authority, and now, being fond of his *galonné* with that curious dog-like deathless attachment that these natures, all reckless, wanton, destructive, and mischievous though they be, so commonly bestow, he muttered a terrible curse under his fiercely curled moustaches.

"If the Black Hawk were nailed up in the sun like a kite on a barn-door, I would drive twenty nails through his throat!"

Cecil turned rapidly on him.

"Silence, sir! or I must report you. Another speech like that, and you shall have a turn at Beylick."

It went to his heart to rebuke the poor fellow for an outburst of indignation which had its root in regard for himself, but he knew that to encourage it by so much even as by an expression of gratitude for the affection borne him would be to sow further and deeper the poison-seeds of that inclination to mutiny, and that rebellious hatred against their chief, already only planted too strongly in the squadrons under Châteauroy's command.

Petit Picpon looked as crestfallen as one of his fraternity could; he knew well enough that what he had said could get him twenty blows of the *matraque*, if his Corporal chose to give him up to judgment; but he had too much of the Parisian in him still not to have his say, though he should be shot for it.

"Send me to Beylick if you like, Corporal," he said, sturdily; "I was in wrath for you—not for myself. Diantre!"

Cecil was infinitely more touched than he dared, for sake of discipline, for sake of the speaker himself, to show; but his glance dwelt on Petit Picpon with a look that the quick, black, monkey-like eyes of the rebel were swift to read.

"I know," he said, gravely. "I do not misjudge you; but, at the same time, my name must never serve as a pretext for insubordination. Such men as care to pleasure me will best do so in making my duty light by their own self-control and obedience to the rules of their service."

He led his horse away, and Petit Picpon went on on an errand he had been sent to do in the streets for one of the officers. Picpon was unusually thoughtful and sober in deportment for him, since he was usually given to making his progress along a road, taken unobserved by those in command over him, "*faisant roue*," with hands and heels in the dexterous somersaults of his early days.

Now he went along without any unprofessional antics, biting the tip of a smoked-out cigar which he had picked up off the pavement in sheer instinct, retained from the old times when he had used to rush in, the foremost of *la queue*, into the forsaken theatres of Bouffes or of Variétés in search for those odds and ends which the departed audience might have left behind them;—one of the favourite modes of seeking a livelihood with the Parisian night-birds.

"Dam! I will give it up, then," resolved Picpon, half aloud, valorously.

Now Picpon had come forth on evil thoughts intent.

His officer—a careless and extravagant man, the richest man in the regiment—had given him a rather small velvet bag, sealed, with directions to take it to a certain notorious beauty of Algiers, whose handsome Moresco eyes smiled—or at least he believed so—exclusively for the time on the sender. Picpon was very quick, intelligent, and much liked by his superiors, so that he was often employed on errands; and the tricks he played in the execution thereof were so adroitly done that they were never detected. Picpon had chuckled to himself over this mission. It was but the work of an instant for the lithe nimble fingers of the ex-gamin to undo the bag without touching the seal, to see that it contained a hundred Napoléons with a note, to slip the gold into the folds of his *ceinturon*, to fill up the sack with date-stones to make it assume its original form so that none could have imagined it had been touched, and to proceed with it thus to the Moorish *lionne's* dwelling. The negro who always opened her door would take it in; Picpon would hint to him to be careful, as it contained some rare and rich sweetmeats; negro nature, he well knew, would impel him to search for the bonbons; and the bag, under his clumsy treatment, would bear plain marks of having been tampered with, and, as the African had a most thievish reputation, he would never be believed if he swore himself guiltless. *Voilà!* here was a neat trick! If it had a drawback, it was that it was too simple, too little *risqué*. A child might do it.

Still—a hundred Naps.! What fat geese, what

flagons of brandy, what dozens of wine, what rich soups, what handsome moukieras, what tavern banquets they would bring ! Picpon had chuckled again as he arranged the little bag so carefully, with its date-stones, and pictured the rage of the beautiful Moor when she should discover the contents, and order the stick to her negro. Ah ! that was what Picpon called fun !

To appreciate the full force of such fun, it is necessary to have also appreciated the *gamin*. To understand the legitimate aspect such a theft bore, it is necessary to have also understood the unrecordable codes that govern the genus *pratique*, into which the genus *gamin*, when at maturity, develops.

Picpon was quite in love with his joke ; it was only a good joke in his sight ; and, indeed, men need to live as hardly as an African soldier lives, to estimate the full temptation that gold can have when you have come to look on a cat as very good eating, and to have nothing to gnaw but a bit of old shoe-leather through the whole of the long hours of a burning day of fatigue-duty ; and to estimate, as well, the full width and depth of the renunciation that made him mutter now so valorously, "Dieu ! I will give it up, then !"

Picpon did not know himself as he said it. Yet he turned down into a lonely narrow lane, under marble walls, overtopped with fig and palm from some fine gardens, undid the bag for the second time, whisked out the date-stones and threw them over the

wall, so that they should be out of his reach if he repented, put back the Napoléons, closed the little sack, ran as hard as he could scamper to his destination, delivered his charge into the fair lady's own hands, and relieved his feelings by a score of somersaults along the pavement as fast as ever he could go.

"*Ma cantche!*" he thought, as he stood on his head, with his legs at an acute angle in the air, a position very favoured by him for moments of reflection—he said his brain worked better upside down. "*Ma cantche!* what a weakness, what a weakness! What remorse to have yielded to it! Beneath you, Picpon—utterly beneath you. Just because that *ci-devant* says such follies please him in us!"

Picpon (then in his *gamin* stage) had been enrolled in the Chasseurs at the same time with the "*ci-devant*," as they called Bertie, and, following his *gamin* nature, had exhausted all his resources of impudence, maliciousness, and power of tormenting, on the "*aristocrat*;" somewhat disappointed, however, that the utmost ingenuities of his insolence and even his malignity never succeeded in breaking the "*aristocrat's*" silence and contemptuous forbearance from all reprisal. For the first two years the hell-on-earth which life with a Franco-Arab regiment seemed to Cecil, was a hundred-fold embittered by the brutalised jests and mosquito-like torments of this little odious chimpanzee of Paris.

One day, however, it chanced that a detachment of Chasseurs, of which Cecil was one, was cut to

pieces by such an overwhelming mass of Arabs, that scarce a dozen of them could force their way through the Bedouins with life ; he was amongst those few, and a flight at full speed was the sole chance of regaining their encampment. Just as he had shaken his bridle free of the Arabs' clutch, and had mowed himself a clear path through their ranks, he caught sight of his young enemy, Picpon, on the ground, with a lance broken off in his ribs, guarding his head, with bleeding hands, as the horses trampled over him. To make a dash at the boy, though to linger a moment was to risk certain death, to send his steel through an Arab who came in his way, to lean down and catch hold of the lad's sash, to swing him up into his saddle and throw him across it in front of him, and to charge afresh through the storm of musket-balls, and ride on thus burdened, was the work of ten seconds with "*Bel-à-faire-peur.*" And he brought the boy safe over a stretch of six leagues in a flight for life, though the imp no more deserved the compassion than a scorpion that has spent all its noxious day stinging at every point of uncovered flesh would merit tenderness from the hand it had poisoned.

When he was swung down from the saddle and laid in front of a vidette fire, sheltered from the bitter north wind that was then blowing cruelly, the bright, black, ape-like eyes of the Parisian *diablotin* opened with a strange gleam in them :

"*Picpon s'en souviendra,*" he murmured.

And Picpon had kept his word; he had remembered often; he remembered now, standing on his head and thinking of his hundred Napoléons surrendered because thieving and stealing in the regiment gave pain to that oddly prejudiced *ci-devant*. This was the sort of loyalty that the Franco-Arabs rendered; this was the sort of influence that the English Guardsman exercised amongst his Roumis.

Meantime, while Picpon made a human cone of himself, to the admiration of the polyglot crowd of the Algerine street, Cecil, having watered, fed, and littered down his tired horse, made his way to a little café he commonly frequented, and spent the few sous he could afford on an iced draught of lemon-flavoured drink. Eat he could not; over-fatigue had given him a nausea for food, and the last hour, motionless in the intense glow of the afternoon sun, had brought that racking pain through his temples which assailed him rarely now, but which in his first years in Africa had given him many hours of agony. He could not stay in the café; it was the hour of dinner for many, and the odours joined with the noise were insupportable to him.

A few doors farther in the street, which was chiefly of Jewish and Moslem shops, there was a quaint place, kept by an old Moor, who had some of the rarest and most beautiful treasures of Algerian workmanship in his long, dark, silent chambers. With this old man Cecil had something of a friendship; he had protected him one day from the

mockery and outrage of some drunken Indigènes, and the Moor, warmly grateful, was ever ready to give him a cup of coffee and a hubble-bubble in the stillness of his dwelling. Its resort was sometimes welcome to him as the one spot, quiet and noiseless, to which he could escape out of the continuous turmoil of street and of barrack, and he went thither now. He found the old man sitting cross-legged behind his counter; a noble-looking aged Mussulman, with a long beard like white silk, with cashmeres and brodered stuffs of peerless texture hanging above his head, and all around him things of silver, of gold, of ivory, of amber, of feathers, of bronze, of emeralds, of ruby, of beryl, whose rich colours glowed through the darkness.

"No coffee, no sherbet, thanks, good father," said Cecil, in answer to the Moor's hospitable entreaties. "Give me only license to sit in the quiet here. I am very tired."

"Sit and be welcome, my son," said Ben Arsli. "Whom should this roof shelter in honour, if not thee? Musjid shall bring thee the supreme solace."

The supreme solace was a narghilé, and its great bowl of rose-water was soon set down by the little Moorish lad at Cecil's side. Whether fatigue really weighted his eyes with slumber, or whether the soothing sedative of the pipe had its influence, he had not sat long in the perfect stillness of the Moor's shop before the narrow view of the street under the awning without was lost to him, the lustre and confusion of shadowy hues swam awhile before his eyes, the throb-

bing pain in his temples grew duller, and he slept—the heavy, dreamless sleep of intense exhaustion.

Ben Arsli glanced at him, and bade Musjid be very quiet. Half an hour or more passed; none had entered the place. The grave old Moslem was half slumbering himself, when there came a delicate odour of perfumed laces, a delicate rustle of silk swept the floor; a lady's voice asked the price of an ostrich-egg, superbly mounted in gold. Ben Arsli opened his eyes—the Chasseur slept on: the new-comer was one of those great ladies who now and then winter in Algeria.

Her carriage waited without: she was alone, making purchase of those innumerable splendid trifles with which Algiers is rife, while she drove through the town in the cooler hour before the sun sank into the western sea.

The Moor rose instantly, with profound salaams, before her, and began to spread before her the richest treasures of his stock. Under plea of the light, he remained near the entrance with her; money was dear too him, and must not be lost, but he would make it if he could without awakening the tired soldier. Marvellous caskets of mother-of-pearl; carpets soft as down, with every brilliant hue melting one within another; coffee equipages, of inimitable metal work; silver statuettes, exquisitely chased and wrought; feather-fans, and screens of every beauty of device, were spread before her, and many of them were bought by her with that unerring grace of taste and lavishness of expenditure which were her character-

istics, but which are far from always found in unison ; and throughout her survey, Ben Arsli had kept her near the entrance, and Cecil had slept on unaroused by the low tones of their voices.

A roll of notes had passed from her hand to the Moslem's, and she was about to pass out to her carriage, when a lamp which hung at the farther end caught her fancy. It was very singular, a mingling of coloured glass, silver, gold, and ivory being wrought in with much beauty in its formation.

"Is that for sale?" she inquired.

As he answered in the affirmative, she moved up the shop, and, her eyes being lifted to the lamp, had drawn close to Cecil before she saw him. When she did so, she paused near, in astonishment :

"Is that soldier asleep?"

"He is, Madame," softly answered the old man, in his slow, studied French. "He comes here to rest sometimes out of the noise ; he was very tired to-day, and I think ill, would he have confessed it."

"Indeed!" Her eyes fell on him with compassion ; he had fallen into an attitude of much grace, and of utter exhaustion ; his head was uncovered and rested on one arm, so that the face was turned upward. With a woman's rapid comprehensive glance she saw the dark shadow like a bruise under his closed aching eyes, she saw the weary pain upon his forehead, she saw the whiteness of his hands, the slenderness of his wrists, the softness of his hair ; she saw, as she had seen before, that whatever he might be now, in some past time he had been a man of gentle blood, of courtly bearing.

"He is a Chasseur d'Afrique?" she asked the Moslem.

"Yes, Madame. I think—he must have been something very different some day."

She did not answer; she stood with her thoughtful eyes gazing on the worn-out soldier.

"He saved me once, Madame, at much risk to himself, from the savagery of some Turcos," the old man went on. "Of course he is always welcome under my roof. The companionship he has must be bitter to him, I fancy; they do say he would have had his officer's grade, and the cross, too, long before now, if it were not for his Colonel's hatred."

"Ah! I have seen him before now; he carves in ivory. I suppose he has a good sale for those things with you?"

The Moor looked up in amazement.

"In ivory, Madame? — *he*? Allah-il-Allah! I never heard of it. It is strange——"

"Very strange. Doubtless you would have given him a good price for them?"

"Surely I would; any price he should have wished. Do I not owe him my life?"

At that moment little Musjid let fall a valuable coffee-tray, inlaid with amber; his master, with muttered apology, hastened to the scene of accident; the noise startled Cecil, and his eyes unclosed to all the dreamy fantastic colours of the place, and met those bent on him in musing pity—saw that lustrous, haughty, delicate head bending slightly down through the many-coloured shadows.

He thought he was dreaming, yet on instinct he rose, staggering slightly, for sharp pain was still darting through his head and temples.

"Madame ! pardon me ! Was I sleeping ?"

"You were, and rest again. You look ill ?" she said, gently ; and there was, for a moment, less of that accent in her voice which, the night before, had marked so distinctly, so pointedly, the line of demarcation between a Princess of Spain and a soldier of Africa.

"I thank you, I ail nothing."

He had no sense that he did, in the presence of that face which had the beauty of his old life ; under the charm of that voice which had the music of his buried years.

"I fear that is scarcely true ?" she answered him. "You look in pain ; though as a soldier, perhaps, you will not own it ?"

"A headache from the sun—no more, Madame."

He was careful not again to forget the social gulf which yawned between them.

"That is quite bad enough ! Your service must be severe ?"

"In Africa, Miladi, one cannot expect indulgence."

"I suppose not. You have served long ?"

"Twelve years, Madame."

"And your name ?"

"Louis Victor." She fancied there was a slight abruptness in the reply, as though he were about to add some other name, and checked himself.

She entered it in the little book from which she had taken her bank-notes.

"I may be able to serve you," she said, as she wrote. "I will speak of you to the Marshal; and when I return to Paris, I may have an opportunity to bring your name before the Emperor. He is as rapid as his uncle to reward military merit; but he has not his uncle's opportunities for personal observation of his soldiers."

The colour flushed his forehead.

"You do me much honour," he said, rapidly, "but if you would gratify me, Madame, do not seek to do anything of the kind."

"And why? Do you not even desire the cross?"

"I desire nothing, except to be forgotten."

"You seek what others dread, then!"

"It may be so. At any rate, if you would serve me, Madame, never say what can bring me into notice."

She regarded him with much surprise, with some slight sense of annoyance; she had bent far in tendering her influence at the French Court to a private soldier, and his rejection of it seemed as ungracious as it was inexplicable.

At that moment the Moor joined them.

"Miladi has told me, Monsieur Victor, that you are a first-rate carver of ivories. How is it you have never let me benefit by your art?"

"My things are not worth a sou," muttered Cecil, hurriedly.

"You do them great injustice, and yourself also,"

said the *grande dame*, more coldly than she had before spoken. "Your carvings are singularly perfect, and should bring you considerable returns."

"Why have you never shown them to me at least?" pursued Ben Arsli—"why not have given me my option?"

The blood flushed Cecil's face again; he turned to the Princess.

"I withheld them, Madame, not because he would have underpriced, but overpriced them. He rates a trifling act of mine of long ago so unduly."

She bent her head in silence; yet a more grateful comprehension of his motive she could not have given than her glance alone gave.

Ben Arsli stroked his great beard; more moved than his Moslem dignity would show.

"Always so!" he muttered, "always so! My son, in some life before this, was not generosity your ruin?"

"Miladi was about to purchase that lamp?" asked Cecil, avoiding the question. "Her Highness will not find anything like it in all Algiers."

The lamp was taken down, and the conversation turned from himself.

"May I bear it to your carriage, Madame?" he asked, as she moved to leave, having made it her own, while her footman carried out the smaller articles she had bought to the equipage. She bowed in silence; she was very proud, she was not wholly satisfied with herself for having conversed thus with a Chasseur

d'Afrique in a Moor's bazaar. Still, she vaguely felt pity for this man; she equally vaguely desired to serve him.

"Wait, Monsieur Victor!" she said, as he closed the door of her carriage. "I accepted your chessmen last night, but you are very certain that it is impossible I can retain them on such terms."

A shadow darkened his face.

"Let your dogs break them, then, Madame. They shall not come back to me."

"You mistake, I did not mean that I would send them back. I simply desire to offer you some equivalent for them. There must be something that you wish for?—something which would be acceptable to you in the life you lead?"

"I have already named the only thing I desire."

He had been solicitous to remember and sustain the enormous difference in their social degrees; but at the offer of her gifts, of her patronage, of her recompense, the pride of his old life rose up to meet her own.

"To be forgotten? A sad wish! Nay, surely life in a regiment of Africa cannot be so cloudless that it can create in you no other?"

"It is not. I have another."

"Then tell it to me; it shall be gratified."

"It is to enjoy a luxury long ago lost for ever. It is—to be allowed to give the slight courtesy of a gentleman without being tendered the wage of a servant."

She understood him; she was moved, too, by the inflexion of his voice. She was not so cold, not so negligent, as the world called her.

"I had passed my word to grant it; I cannot retract," she answered him, after a pause. "I will press nothing more on you. But—as an obligation to me—can you find no way in which a rouleau of gold would benefit your men?"

"No way that I can take it for them. But, if you care indeed to do them a charity, a little wine, a little fruit, a few flowers (for there are those among them who love flowers), sent to the hospital, will bring many benedictions on your name, Madame. They lie in infinite misery there!"

"I will remember," she said, simply, while a thoughtful sadness passed over her brilliant face. "Adieu! M. le Caporal; and, if you should think better of your choice, and will allow your name to be mentioned by me to His Majesty, send me word through my people. There is my card."

The carriage whirled away down the crooked street; he stood under the tawny awning of the Moorish house, with the thin glazed card in his hand. On it was printed:

*"Mme. la Princesse Corona d'Amâgué,
Hôtel Corona, Paris."*

In the corner was written, "Villa Aïoussa, Algiers." He thrust it in the folds of his sash, and turned within.

"Do you know her?" he asked Ben Arsli.

The old man shook his head.

"She is the most beautiful of thy many fair Frankish women. I never saw her till to-day. She seemed to have an interest in thee, my son. But listen here. Touching these ivory toys—if thou dost not bring henceforth to me all the work in them that thou doest, thou shalt never come here more to meet the light of her eyes."

Cecil smiled and pressed the Moslem's hand.

"I kept them away because you would have given me a hundred piastres for what had not been worth one. As for her eyes, they are stars that shine on another world than an African trooper's. So best!"

Yet they were stars of which he thought more, as he wended his way back to the barraeks, than of the splendid constellations of the Algerian evening that shone with all the lustre of the day, but with a soft enchanted light which transfigured sea and earth and sky as never did the day's full glow, as he returned to the mechanical duties, to the thankless services, to the distasteful meal, to the riotous mirth, to the coarse comradeship, which seemed to him to-night more bitter than they had ever done since his very identity, his very existence, had been killed and buried past recall, past resurrection, under the *képi d'ordonnance* of a Chasseur d'Afrique.

Meantime the Princesse Corona drove homeward—homeward to where a temporary home had been made by her in the most elegant of the many snow-white villas that stud the sides of the Sahel and face

the bright bow of the sunlit bay ; a villa with balconies, and awnings, and cool silent chambers, and rich glowing gardens, and a broad low roof half hidden in bay and orange and myrtle and basilica, and the liquid sound of waters bubbling beneath a riotous luxuriance of blossom.

Madame la Princesse passed from her carriage to her own morning-room, and sank down on a couch a little listless and weary with her search among the treasures of the Algerine bazaars. It was purposeless work, after all. Had she not bronzes, and porcelains, and bric-à-brac, and *objets d'art* in profusion in her Roman villa, her Parisian hôtel, her great grim palace in the far Asturias ?

"Not one of those things do I want—not one shall I look at twice. The money would have been better at the soldiers' hospital," she thought, while her eyes dwelt on a chess-table near her—a table on which the mimic hosts of Chasseurs and Arabs were ranged in opposed squadrons.

She took the White King in her hand and gazed at it with a certain interest.

"That man has been noble once," she thought. "What a fate !—what a cruel fate !"

It touched her to great pity ; although proud with too intense a pride, her nature was exceedingly generous, and, when once moved, deeply compassionate. The unerring glance of a woman habituated to the first society of Europe had told her that the accent, the bearing, the tone, the features of this soldier,

who only asked of life "oblivion," were those of one originally of gentle blood; and the dignity and patience of his acceptance of the indignities which his present rank entailed on him had not escaped her, any more than the delicate beauty of his face as she had seen it, weary, pale, and shadowed with pain, in the unconscious revelation of sleep.

"How bitter his life must be!" she mused. "When Philip comes, perhaps he will know of some way to aid him. And yet—who can serve a man who only desires to be forgotten?"

Then, with a certain impatient sense of some absurd discrepancy, of some unseemly occupation, in *her* thus dwelling on the wishes and the burdens of a *sous-officier* of Light Cavalry, she laughed a little and put the White Chief back once more in his place. Yet even as she set the king amongst his mimic forces, the very carvings themselves seemed to retain their artist in her memory.

There was about them an indescribable elegance, an exceeding grace and beauty, which spoke of a knowledge of art and of a refinement of taste far beyond those of a mere military amateur in the one who had produced them.

"What could bring a man of that talent, with that address, into the ranks?" she mused. "Persons of good family, of once fine position, come here, they say, and live and die unrecognised under the Imperial flag. It is usually some dishonour that drives them out of their own worlds; it may be so with him. Yet

he does not look like one whom shame has touched ; he is proud still—prouder than he knows. More likely it is the old old story—a high name and a narrow fortune—the ruin of thousands ! He is French, I suppose ; a French aristocrat who has played *au roi dépouillé*, most probably, and buried himself and his history for ever beneath those two names that tell one nothing—Louis Victor. Well, it is no matter of mine. Very possibly he is a mere adventurer with a good manner. This army here is a pot-pourri, they say, of all the varied scoundrelisms of Europe ! ”

She left the chess-table and went onward to the dressing and bath and bed-chambers, which opened in one suite from her boudoir, and resigned herself to the hands of her attendants for her dinner-toilette.

The Moslem had said aright of her beauty ; and now, as her splendid hair was unloosened and gathered up afresh with a crescent-shaped comb of gold that was not brighter than the tresses themselves, the brilliant, haughty, thoughtful face was of a truth, as he had said, the fairest that had ever come from the Frankish shores to the hot African seaboard. Many beside the old Moslem had thought it “the fairest that e’er the sun shone on,” and held one grave lustrous glance of the blue imperial eyes above aught else on earth. Many had loved her—all without return. Yet, although only twenty years had passed over her proud head, the Princess Corona d’Amägué had been wedded and been widowed.

Wedded, with no other sentiment than that of a certain pity and a certain honour for the man whose noble Spanish name she took. Widowed, by a death that was the seal of her marriage-sacrament, and left her his wife only in name and law.

The marriage had left no chain upon her; it had only made her mistress of wide wealth, of that villa on the Sicilian Sea, of that light spacious palace-dwelling in Paris that bore her name, of that vast majestic old castle throned on brown Estremaduran crags, and looking down on mighty woods of cork and chesnut, and flashing streams of falling water hurling through the gorges. The death had left no regret upon her; it had only given her for a while a graver shadow over the brilliancy of her youth and of her beauty, and given her for always—or for so long, at least, as she so chose to use it—a plea for that indifference to men's worship of her which their sex called heartlessness, which her own sex thought an ultra-refined coquetry, and which was in real truth neither the one nor the other, but simply the negligence of a woman very difficult to touch, and, as it had seemed, impossible to charm.

None knew quite aright the history of that marriage. Some were wont to whisper it "ambition;" and, when that whisper came round to her, her splendid lips would curl with as splendid a scorn.

"Do they not know that scarce any marriage can mate *us* equally?" she would ask; for she came of a great Line that thought few royal branches on

equality with it; and she cherished as things of strictest creed and fact the legends that gave to her race, with its amber hair and its eyes of sapphire blue, the blood of King Arthur in their veins.

Of a surety it was not ambition that had allied her, on his death-bed, with Beltran Corona d'Amägué; but what it was the world could never tell precisely. The world would not have believed if it had heard the truth—the truth that it had been, in a different fashion, a gleam of something of that same compassion which now made her merciful to a private trooper of Africa which had wedded her to the dead Spanish Prince: compassion which, with many another rich and generous thing, lay beneath her coldness and her pride as the golden stamen lies folded within the white virginal chill cup of the lily.

She had never felt a touch of even passing preference to any one out of the many who had sought her high-born beauty; she was too proud to be easily moved to such selection, and she was far too habituated to homage to be wrought upon by it ever so slightly. She was of a noble, sun-lit, gracious nature; she had been always happy, always obeyed, always caressed, always adored; it had rendered her immeasurably contemptuous of flattery; it had rendered her a little contemptuous of pain. She had never had aught to regret; it was not possible that she could realise what regret was.

Hence men called and found her very cold; yet

those of her own kin whom she loved knew that the heart of a summer rose was not warmer, nor sweeter, nor richer than hers. And first amongst these was her half-brother, twenty years her senior—at once her guardian and her slave—who thought her perfect, and would no more have crossed her will than he would have set his foot on her beautiful imperial head. Corona d'Amägué had been his friend; the only one for whom he had ever sought to break her unvarying indifference to her lovers, but for whom even he had pleaded vainly until one autumn season, when they had stayed together at a great archducal castle in South Austria.

In one of the forest-glades, awaiting the *fanfare* of the hunt, she rejected, for the third time, the passionate supplication of the superb noble who ranked with the D'Ossuna and the Medina-Sidonia. He rode from her in great bitterness, in grief that no way moved her—she was importuned with these entreaties to weariness. An hour after, he was brought past her, wounded and senseless; he had saved her brother from imminent death at his own cost, and the tusks of the mighty Styrian boar had plunged through and through his frame as they had met in the narrow woodland glade.

“He will be a cripple—a paralysed cripple—for life!” said the one whose life had been rescued by this devotion to her; and his lips shook a little under his golden beard as he spoke.

She looked at him; she loved him well, and no homage to herself could have moved her as this sacrifice for her brother had done.

"You think he will live?" she asked.

"They say it is sure. He may live on to old age. But how? My God! what a death in life! And all for my sake, in my stead!"

She was silent several moments; then she raised her face, a little paler than it had been, but with a passionless resolve set on it.

"Philip, *we* do not leave our debts unpaid. Go; tell him I will be his wife."

"His wife—now! Venetia!——"

"Go!" she said, briefly. "Tell him what I say."

"But what a sacrifice! In your beauty, in your youth——"

"He did not count cost. Are we less generous? Go—tell him."

He was told; and was repaid. Such a light of unutterable joy burnt through the misty agony of his eyes as never, it seemed to those who saw, had beamed before in mortal eyes. He did not once hesitate at the acceptance of her self-surrender; he only pleaded that the marriage ceremony should pass between them that night.

There were notaries and many priests in the great ducal household; all was done as he desired. She consented without wavering; she had passed her word, she would not have withdrawn it if its redemption had been a thousand times more bitter.

The honour of her house was dearer to her than any individual happiness. This man, for them, had lost peace, health, joy, strength, every hope of life; to dedicate her own life to him, as he had vainly prayed her when in the full glow and vigour of his manhood, was the only means by which their vast debt to him could be paid. To thus pay it was the instant choice of her high code of honour, and of a generosity that would not be outrun. Moreover, she pitied him unspeakably, though her heart had no tenderness for him; she had dismissed him with cold disdain, and he had gone from her to save the only creature that she loved, and was stretched a stricken, broken, helpless wreck, with endless years of pain and weariness before him!

So—at midnight, in the great dim magnificence of the state chamber where he lay, and with the low, soft chanting of the chapel choir from afar echoing through the incensed air, she bent her haughty head down over his couch, and the marriage benediction was spoken over them.

His voice was faint and broken, but it had the thrill of a passionate triumph in it. When the last words were uttered, he lay awhile, exhausted, silent, only looking ever upward at her with his dark, dreamy eyes, in which the old love glanced so strangely through the blindness of pain. Then he smiled as the last echo of the choral melodies died softly on the silence.

“That is joy enough! Ah! have no fear. With

the dawn you will be free once more. Did you think that I could have taken your sacrifice? I knew well, let them say as they would, that I should not live the night through. But, lest existence should linger to curse me, to chain you, I rent the linen bands off my wounds an hour ago. All their science will not put back the life *now*! My limbs are dead, and the cold steals up! Ah, love! ah, love! You never thought how men can suffer! But have no grief for me. I am happy. Bend your head down, and lay your lips on mine once. You are my own!—death is sweeter than life!”

And before sunrise he died.

Some shadow from that fatal and tragic midnight marriage rested on her still. Though she was blameless, some vague remorse ever haunted her; though she had been so wholly guiltless of it, this death for her sake ever seemed in some sort of her bringing. Men thought her only colder, only prouder; but they erred. She was one of those women who, beneath the courtly negligence of a chill manner, are capable of infinite tenderness, infinite nobility, and infinite self-reproach.

A great French painter once, in Rome, looking on her from a distance, shaded his eyes with his hand, as if her beauty, like the sun, dazzled him.

“Exquisite—superb!” he muttered; and he was a man whose own ideals were so matchless that living women rarely could ring out his praise. “She is nearly perfect, your Princess Corona!”

"Nearly!" cried a Roman sculptor. "What, in Heaven's name, can she want?"

"Only one thing!"

"And that is——?"

"*To have loved.*"

Wherewith he turned into the Greco.

He had found the one flaw—and it was still there.
What he had missed in her, still was wanting.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LITTLE LEOPARD OF FRANCE.

"V'la ce que c'est la gloire—au grabat!"

The contemptuous sentence was crushed through Cigarette's tight-pressed bright-red lips with an irony sadder than tears. She was sitting on the edge of a *grabat*, hard as wood, comfortless as a truss of straw, and looking down the long hospital-room with its endless rows of beds and its hot sun shining blindingly on its glaring whitewashed walls.

She was well known and well loved there. When her little brilliant-hued figure fluttered, like some scarlet bird of Africa, down the dreary length of those chambers of misery, bloodless lips close-clenched in torture would stir with a smile, would move with a word of welcome. No tender-voiced dove-eyed Sister of Orders of Mercy, gliding grey and soft, and like a living psalm of consolation, beside those couches of misery, bore with them the infinite inexpressible charm that the Friend of the Flag brought to the

sufferers. The Sisters were good, were gentle, were valued as they merited by the greatest blackguard prostrate there; but they never smiled, they never took the dying heart of a man back with one glance to the days of his childhood, they never gave a wild snatch of song, like a bird's on a spring-blossoming bough, that thrilled through half-dead senses with a thousand voices from a thousand buried hours.

"But the Little One," as said a gaunt grey-bearded Zéphyr once, where he lay with the death-chill stealing slowly up his jagged, torn frame—"the Little One—do you see—she is youth, she is life; she is all we have lost. That is her charm! The Sisters are good women, they are very good; but they only *pity* us. The little one, she *loves* us. That is the difference, do you see?"

It was all the difference—a wide difference; she loved them all, with the warmth and fire of her young heart, for sake of France and of their common Flag. And though she was but a wild wayward mischievous *gamin*, a *gamin* all over though in a girl's form, men would tell in camp and hospital, with great tears coursing down their brown scarred cheeks, how her touch would fall as softly as a snow-flake on their heated foreheads, how her watch would be kept by them through long nights of torment, how her gifts of golden trinkets would be sold or pawned as soon as received to buy them ice or wine, and how in their delirium the sweet fresh voice of the Child of the Regiment would soothe them, singing

above their wretched beds some carol or chant of their own native province, which it always seemed that she must know by magic. For, were it Basque or Breton, were it a sea-lay of Vendée or a mountain-song of the Orientales, were it a mere ringing rhyme for the mules of Alsace, or a wild bold romanesque from the country of Berri, Cigarette knew each and all, and never erred by any chance, but ever sung to every soldier the rhythm familiar from his infancy, the melody of his mother's cradle-song and of his first love's lips. And there had been times when those songs suddenly breaking through the darkness of night, suddenly lulling the fiery anguish of wounds, had made the men who one hour before had been like mad dogs, like goaded tigers, men full of the lusts of slaughter and the lusts of the senses, and chained powerless and blaspheming to a bed of agony, tremble and shudder at themselves, and turn their faces to the wall and weep like children, and fall asleep, at length, with wondering dreams of God.

"*V'la ce que c'est la gloire—au grabat !*" said Cigarette, now grinding her pretty teeth. She was in her most revolutionary and reckless mood, drumming the rataplan with her spurred heels, and sitting smoking on the corner of old Miou-Matou's mattress. Miou-Matou, who had acquired that title among the *joyeux* for his scientific powers of making a tom-cat into a stew so divine that you could not tell it from rabbit, being laid up with a ball in his hip, a

spear-head between his shoulders, a rib or so broken, and one or two other little trifling casualties.

Miou-Matou, who looked very like an old grizzly bear, laughed in the depths of his great hairy chest.

"Dream of glory, and end on a *grabat*! Just so, just so. And yet one has pleasures—to sweep off an Arbico's neck nice and clean—swish!" And he described a circle with his lean brawny arm with as infinite a relish as a dilettante grown blind would listen thirstily to the description of an exquisite bit of Faïence or Della Quercia work.

"Pleasures! My God! Infinite, endless misery!" murmured a man on her right hand. He was not thirty years of age, with a delicate, dark, beautiful head that might have passed as model to a painter for a St. John. He was dying fast of the most terrible form of pulmonary maladies.

Cigarette flashed her bright falcon glance over him.

"Well! is it not misery that is glory?"

"We think that it is when we are children. God help us!" murmured the man who lay dying of lung-disease.

"Ouf! Then we think rightly! Glory! Is it the cross, the star, the bâton? No! He who wins those*

* Having received ardent reproaches from Field-Officers and Commanders of Divisions for the injustice done to military chiefs by this sentence, I beg to assure them the injustice is Cigarette's;—not mine. I should be very sorry, for an instant, to seem to depreciate the "genius of command," without whose guiding will an army is but a rabble; or to underrate that noblest courage which accepts the burden of arduous responsibilities, and of duties as bitter in anxiety as they are precious in honour.

only reins his horse up on a hill, out of shot range, and watches through his glass how his troops surge up, wave on wave, in the great sea of blood. It is misery that is glory—the misery that toils with bleeding feet under burning suns without complaint; that lies half dead through the long night with but one care, to keep the torn flag free from the conqueror's touch; that bears the rain of blows in punishment rather than break silence and buy release by betrayal of a comrade's trust; that is beaten like the mule, and galled like the horse, and starved like the camel, and housed like the dog, and yet does the thing which is right and the thing which is brave despite all; that suffers, and endures, and pours out his blood like water to the thirsty sands whose thirst is never stilled, and goes up in the morning sun to the combat as though death were the paradise that the *Arbicos* dream, knowing the while that no paradise waits save the crash of the hoof through the throbbing brain, or the roll of the gun-carriage over the writhing limb. *That is glory.* The misery that is heroism because France needs it, because a soldier's honour wills it. *That is glory.* It is here to-day in the Hospital, as it never is in the *Cour des Princes* where the glittering host of the Marshals gather!"

Her voice rang clear as a clarion; the warm blood burnt in her bright cheeks; the swift, fiery, pathetic eloquence of her nation moved her, and moved strangely the hearts of her hearers; for though she could neither read nor write, there was in Cigarette

the germ of that power which the world mistily calls Genius.

There were men lying in that sick-chamber brutalised, crime-stained, ignorant as the bullocks of the plains, and, like them, reared and driven for the slaughter; yet there was not one among them to whom some ray of light failed to come from those words, through whom some thrill failed to pass as they heard them. Out yonder in the free air, in the barrack-court, or on the plains, the Little One would rate them furiously, mock them mercilessly, rally them with the flat of a sabre if they were mutinous, and lash them with the most pitiless ironies if they were grumbling; but here, in the hospital, the Little One loved them, and they knew it, and that love gave a flute-like music to the passion of her voice.

Then she laughed, and drummed the rataplan again with her brass heel.

"All the same; one is not in paradise *au grabat*, eh, Père Matou?" she said, curtly.

She was half impatient of her own momentary lapse into enthusiasm, and she knew the temper of her "children" as accurately as a bugler knows the notes of the *réveillé*—knew that they loved to laugh even with the death-rattle in their throats, and, with their hearts half breaking over a comrade's corpse, would cry in burlesque mirth, "*Ah, le bon-zig! Il a avalé sa cartouche!*"

"Paradise!" growled Père Matou. "Ouf! Who wants that? If one had a few *bidons* of brandy, now——"

"Brandy? Oh-hé. You are to be much more of aristocrats now than that!" cried Cigarette, with an immeasurable satire curling on her rosy, piquante lips. "The Silver Pheasants have taken to patronise you. *Ma cantche!* if I were you, I would not touch a glass nor eat a fig; you will not if you have the spirit of a rabbit. You! Fed like dogs with the leavings of her table—pardieu! that is not for soldiers of France!"

"Eh? What dost thou say?" growled Miou-Matou, peering up under his grey shaggy brows.

"Only that a *grande dame* has sent you champagne. That is all. Sapristi! how easy it is to play the saint and Samaritan with two words to one's *maitre d'hôtel*, and a *rouleau* of gold that one never misses! The rich—they can buy all things, you see, even heaven, so cheap!"

With which withering satire Cigarette left Père Matou in the conviction that he must be already dead and amongst the angels if people began to talk of champagne to him, and flitting down between the long rows of beds with the old disabled veterans who tended them, skimmed her way, like a bird as she was, into another great chamber, filled, like the first, with suffering in all stages and at all years, from the boy-conscript, tossing in African fever, to the white-haired campaigner of a hundred wounds.

Cigarette was as caustic as a Voltaire this morning. Coming through the entrance of the hospital, she had casually heard that Madame la Princesse Corona d'Amügué had made a gift of singular munificence and

mercy to the invalid soldiers—a gift of wine, of fruit, of flowers, that would brighten their long dreary hours for many weeks. Who Madame la Princesse might be she knew nothing; but the title was enough, she was a silver pheasant—bah! And Cigarette hated the aristocrats—when they were of the sex feminine.

“An aristocrat in adversity is an eagle,” she would say; “but an aristocrat in prosperity is a peacock.”

Which was the reason why she flouted glittering young nobles with all the insolence imaginable, but took the part of “Marquise,” of “Bel-à-faire-peur,” and of such wanderers like them, who had buried their sixteen quarterings under the black shield of the *Enfans Perdus* of Africa.*

With a word here and a touch there—tender, soft, and bright, since, however ironic her mood, she never brought anything except sunshine to those who lay in such sore need of it, beholding the sun in the heavens only through the narrow chink of a hospital window;—at last she reached the bed she came most specially to visit: a bed on which was stretched the emaciated form of a man once beautiful as a Greek dream of a God.

The dews of a great agony stood on his forehead; his teeth were tight clenched on lips white and parched; and his immense eyes, with the heavy circles round them, were fastened on vacancy with the yearning misery that gleams in the eyes of a Spanish bull when it is struck again and again by the matador, and yet cannot die.

* The “*écusson noir*” on the uniform of the “*Zéphyrs*.”

She bent over him softly.

"*Tiens, Monsieur Léon!* I have brought you some ice."

His weary eyes turned on her gratefully; he sought to speak, but the effort brought the spasm on his lungs afresh; it shook him with horrible violence from head to foot, and the foam on his auburn beard was red with blood.

There was no one by to watch him; he was sure to die; a week sooner or later—what mattered it? He was useless as a soldier; good only to be thrown into a pit, with some quick-lime to hasten destruction and do the work of the slower earthworms.

Cigarette said not a word, but she took out of some vine-leaves a cold hard lump of ice, and held it to him; the delicious coolness and freshness in that parching noontide heat stilled the convulsion; his eyes thanked her, though his lips could not; he lay panting, exhausted, but relieved; and she—thoughtfully for her—slid herself down on the floor and began singing, low and sweetly, as a fairy might sing on the raft of a water-lily leaf.

She sang *gaudrioles*, to be sure, Béranger's songs and odes of the camp; for she knew of no hymn but the *Marseillaise*, and her chants were all chants like the *Laus Veneris*. But the voice that gave them was pure as the voice of a thrush in the spring, and the cadence of its music was so silvery-sweet that it soothed like a spell all the fever-racked brains, all the pain-tortured spirits.

"Ah! that is good," murmured the dying man.

"It is like the brooks—like the birds—like the winds in the leaves."

He was but half conscious; but the lulling of that gliding voice brought him peace. And Cigarette sang on, only moving to reach him some fresh touch of ice, while time travelled fast, and the first afternoon shadows crept across the bare floor. Every now and then, dimly through the openings of the windows, came a distant roll of drums, a burst of military music, an echo of the laughter of a crowd; and then her head went up eagerly, an impatient shade swept across her expressive face.

It was a fête-day in Algiers; there were flags and banners fluttering from the houses, there were Arab races and Arab manœuvres, there was a review of troops for some foreign general, there were all the mirth and the mischief that she loved, and that never went on without her, and she knew well enough that from mouth to mouth there was sure to be asking, "*Mais où donc est Cigarette?*"—Cigarette, who was the Generalissima of Africa!

But still she never moved; though all her vivacious life was longing to be out and in their midst, on the back of a desert horse, on the head of a huge drum, perched on the iron support of a high-hung lantern, standing on a cannon while the Horse Artillery swept full gallop, firing down a volley of *argot* on the hot homage of a hundred lovers, drinking creamy liqueurs and filling her pockets with bonbons from handsome subalterns and aides-de-camp, doing as she had done

ever since she could remember her first rataplan. But she never moved. She knew that in the general gala these sick-beds would be left more deserted and less soothed than ever. She knew, too, that it was for the sake of this man, lying dying here from the lunge of a Bedouin lance through his lungs, that the ivory wreaths and crosses and statuettes had been sold.

And Cigarette had done more than this ere now many a time for her "children."

The day stole on; Léon Ramon lay very quiet; the ice for his chest and the song for his ear gave him that semi-oblivion, dreamy and comparatively painless, which was the only mercy which could come to him. All the chamber was unusually still; on three of the beds the sheet had been drawn over the face of the sleepers, who had sunk to a last sleep since the morning rose. The shadows lengthened, the hours followed one another; Cigarette sang on to herself with few pauses: whenever she did so pause to lay soaked linen on the soldier's hot forehead, or to tend him gently in those paroxysms that wrenched the clotted blood from off his lungs, there was a light on her face that did not come from the golden heat of the African sun.

Such a light those who know well the Children of France may have seen, in battle or in insurrection, grow beautiful upon the young face of conscript or of boy-insurgent as he lifted a dying comrade, or pushed to the front to be slain in another's stead; the face that a moment before had been keen for the

slaughter as the eyes of a kite, and recklessly gay as the saucy refrain the lips carolled.

A step sounded on the bare boards; she looked up, and the wounded man raised his weary lids with a gleam of gladness under them; Cecil bent above his couch.

"Dear Léon! how is it with you?"

His voice was softened to infinite tenderness; Léon Ramon had been for many a year his comrade and his friend; an artist of Paris, a man of marvellous genius, of high idealic creeds, who, in a fatal moment of rash despair, had flung his talents, his broken fortunes, his pure and noble spirit, into the fiery furnace of the hell of military Africa; and now lay dying here, a common soldier, forgotten as though he were already in his grave.

"The review is just over. I got ten minutes to spare, and came to you the instant I could," pursued Cecil. "See here what I bring you! You, with your artist's soul, will feel yourself all but well when you look on these!"

He spoke with a hopefulness he could never feel, for he knew that the life of Léon Ramon was doomed; and as the other strove to gain breath enough to answer him, he gently motioned him to silence, and placed on his bed some peaches bedded deep in moss and circled round with stephanotis, with magnolia, with roses, with other rarer flowers still.

The face of the artist-soldier lightened with a longing joy; his lips quivered.

"Ah, God! they have the fragrance of my France!"

Cecil said nothing, but moved them nearer in to the clasp of his eager hands. Cigarette he did not see.

There were some moments of silence, while the dark eyes of the dying man thirstily dwelt on the beauty of the flowers, and his dry ashen lips seemed to drink in their perfumes as those athirst drink in water.

"They are beautiful," he said, faintly, at length. "They have our youth in them! How came you by them, dear friend?"

"They are not due to me," answered Cecil, hurriedly. "Madame la Princesse Corona sends them to you. She has sent great gifts to the hospital—wines, fruits, a profusion of flowers, such as those. Through her, these miserable chambers will bloom for a while like a garden; and the best wines of Europe will slake your thirst in lieu of that miserable *tisane*."

"It is very kind," murmured Léon Ramon, languidly; life was too feeble in him to leave him vivid pleasure in aught. "But I am ungrateful. La Cigarette here,—she has been so good, so tender, so pitiful. For once I have *almost* not missed you!"

Cigarette, thus alluded to, sprang to her feet with her head tossed back, and all her cynicism back again; a hot petulant colour was on her cheeks, the light had passed from her face, she struck her white teeth together. She had thought "Bel-à-faire-peur"

chained to his regiment in the field of manœuvre, or she would never have come thither to tend his friend. She had felt happy in her self-sacrifice; she had grown into a gentle, pensive, merciful mood, singing here by the side of the dying soldier,—and now the first thing she heard was of the charities of Madame la Princesse!

That was all her reward! Cigarette received the recompense that usually comes to generous natures which have strung themselves to some self-surrender that costs them dear!

Cecil looked at her surprised, and smiled.

“*Ma belle*, is it you? That is, indeed, good. You were the good angel of my life the other night, and to-day come to bring consolation to my friend——”

“‘Good angel!’ *Chut*, M. Victor! One does not know those *mots sucrés* in Algiers. There is nothing of the angel about me, I hope. Your friend, too! Ouf! Do you think I have never been used to taking care of my comrades in hospital before *you* played the sick-nurse here?”

She spoke with all her brusque petulance in arms again; she hated that he should imagine she had sacrificed her fête-day to Léon Ramon, because the artist-trooper was dear to *him*; she hated him to suppose that she had waited there all the hours through on the chance that *he* would find her at her post, and admire her for her charity. Cigarette was far too proud and disdainful a young soldier to seek either his presence or his praise.

He smiled again; he did not understand the caprices of her changeful moods, and he did not feel that interest in her which would have made him divine the threads of their vagaries.

"I did not think to offend you, my Little One," he said, gently. "I meant only to thank you for your goodness to Ramon in my absence."

Cigarette shrugged her shoulders.

"There was no goodness, and there need be no thanks. Ask Père Matou how often I have sat with *him* hours through."

"But on a fête-day! And you who love pleasure, and grace it so well——"

"Ouf! I have had so much of it," said the Little One, contemptuously. "It is so tame to *me*. Clouds of dust, scurry of horses, fanfare of trumpets, thunder of drums, and all for nothing! Bah! I have been in a dozen battles—I—and I am not likely to care much for a sham fight."

"Nay, she is unjust to herself," murmured Léon Ramon. "She gave up the fête to do this mercy—it has been a great one. She is more generous than she will ever allow. Here, Cigarette, look at these scarlet rosebuds; they are like your bright cheeks. Will you have them? I have nothing else to give."

"Rosebuds?" echoed Cigarette, with supreme scorn. "Rosebuds for me? I know no rose but the red of the tricolour; and I could not tell a weed from a flower. Besides, I told Miou-Matou just now, if my children do as *I* tell them, they will not

take a leaf or a peach-stone from this *grande dame*—how does she call herself?—Madame Corona d'Amägué!"

Cecil looked up quickly: "Why not?"

Cigarette flashed on him her brilliant brown eyes with a fire that amazed him.

"Because we are soldiers, not paupers!"

"Surely; but——"

"And it is not for the silver pheasants, who have done nothing to deserve their life but lain in nests of cotton wool, and eaten grain that others sow and shell for them, and spread their shining plumage in a sun that never clouds above their heads, to insult, with the insolence of their 'pity' and their 'charity,' the Heroes of France, who perish, as they have lived, for their Country and their Flag!"

It was a superb peroration! If the hapless flowers lying there had been a cartel of outrage to the concrete majesty of the French Army, the Army's champion could not have spoken with more impassioned force and scorn.

Cecil laughed slightly; but he answered, with a certain annoyance:

"There is no 'insolence' here; no question of it. Madame la Princesse desired to offer some gift to the soldiers of Algiers; I suggested to her that to increase the scant comforts of the hospital, and gladden the weary eyes of sick men with beauties that the Executive never dreams of bestowing, would be the most merciful and acceptable mode of exer-

cising her kindness. If blame there be in the matter, it is mine."

In defending the generosity of what he knew to be a genuine and sincere wish to gratify his comrades, he betrayed what he did not intend to have revealed, namely, the conversation that had passed between himself and the Spanish Princess. Cigarette caught at the inference with the quickness of her lightning-like thought.

"Oh-hé! So it is *she*!"

There was a whole world of emphasis, scorn, meaning, wrath, comprehension, and irony in the four monosyllables; the dying man looked at her with languid wonder.

"She? Who? What story goes with these roses?"

"None," said Cecil, with the same inflection of annoyance in his voice; to have his passing encounter with this beautiful patrician pass into a barrack *canard*, through the unsparing jests of the soldiery around him, was a prospect very unwelcome to him. "None whatever. A generous thoughtfulness for our common necessities as soldiers——"

"Ouf!" interrupted Cigarette, before his phrase was one-third finished. "The stalled mare will not go with the wild coursers; an aristocrat may live with us, but he will always cling to his old Order. This is the story that runs with the roses. Miladi was languidly insolent over some ivory chessmen, and Corporal Victor thought it divine, because lan-

guor and insolence are the twin gods of the noblesse, parbleu ! Miladi, knowing no gods but those two, worships them, and sends to the soldiers of France, as the sort of sacrifice her gods love, fruits and wines that, day after day, are set on her table, to be touched, if tasted at all; with a butterfly's sip ; and Corporal Victor finds this a charity sublime—to give what costs nothing, and scatter a few crumbs out from the profusion of a life of waste and indulgence ! And I say, that if my children are of my fashion of thinking, they will choke like dogs dying of thirst rather than slake their throats with alms cast to them as if they were beggars !”

With which fiery and bitter enunciation of her views on the gifts of the Princess Corona d'Amâgué Cigarette struck light to her *brûle-gueule*, and thrusting it between her lips, with her hands in the folds of her scarlet waist-sash, went off with the light swift step natural to her, exaggerated into the carriage she had learned of the Zouaves, laughing her good-morrows noisily to this and that trooper as she passed their couches, and not dropping her voice even as she passed the place where the dead lay, but singing, as loud as she could, the most impudent drinking-song out of the taverns of the Spahis that ever celebrated wine, women, and war in the lawlessness of the lingua Sabir.

Her wrath was hot, and her heart heavy within her. She had given up her whole fête-day to wait on the anguish and to soothe the solitude of his

friend lying dying there; and her reward had been to hear him speak of this aristocrat's donations, that cost her nothing but the trouble of a few words of command to her household, as though they were the saintly charities of some angel from heaven!

"Diantre!" she muttered, as her hand wandered to the ever-beloved forms of the pistols within her sash. "Echaffaurées or Achmet, or any one of them, would throw a draught of wine in his face, and lay him dead for me, with a pass or two, ten minutes after. Why don't I bid them? I have a mind——"

In that moment she could have shot him dead herself without a second's thought. Storm and sunlight swept, one after another, with electrical rapidity at all times through her vivid changeful temper; and here she had been wounded and been stung in the very hour in which she had subdued her national love of mirth, and her child-like passion for show, and her impatience of all confinement, and her hatred of all things mournful, to the attainment of this self-negation!

Moreover, there mingled with it the fierce and intolerant heat of the passionate and scarce-conscious jealousy of an utterly untamed nature, and of Gallic blood, quick and hot as the steaming springs of the Geyser.

"You have vexed her, Victor," said Léon Ramon, as she was lost to sight through the doors of the great desolate chamber,

"I hope not; I do not know how," answered

Cecil. "It is impossible to follow the windings of her wayward caprices. A child—a soldier—a dancer—a brigand—a spoilt beauty—a mischievous gamin—how is one to treat such a little fagot of opposites?"

The other smiled.

"Ah! you do not know the Little One yet. She is worth a study. I painted her years ago—'La Vivandière à Sept Ans.' There was not a picture in the Salon that winter that was sought like it. I had travelled in Algeria then; I had not entered the Army. The first thing I saw of Cigarette was this: She was seven years old; she had been beaten black and blue; she had had two of her tiny teeth knocked out. The men were furious, she was a pet with them; and she would not say who had done it, though she knew twenty swords would have beaten him flat as a fritter if she had given his name. I got her to sit to me some days after. I pleased her with her own picture. I asked her to tell me why she would not say who had ill-treated her. She put her head on one side like a robin, and told me, in a whisper: 'It was one of my comrades—because I would not steal for him. I would not have the army know—it would demoralise them! If a French soldier ever does a cowardly thing, another French soldier must not betray it.' That was Cigarette—at seven years. The esprit du corps was stronger than her own wrongs. What do you say to that nature?"

"That it is superb!—that it might be moulded to anything. The pity is——"

"Ah, *tais-toi!*" said the artist-trooper, half wearily, half laughingly. "Spare me the old world-worn, threadbare formulas. Because the flax and the colza blossom for use, and the garden-flowers grow trained and pruned, must there be no bud that opens for mere love of the sun, and swings free in the wind in its fearless fair fashion? Believe me, dear Victor, it is the lives which follow no previous rule that do the most good and give the most harvest."

"Surely. Only for this child—a woman—in her future——"

"Her future? Well, she will die, I dare say, some bright day or another, at the head of a regiment, with some desperate battle turned by the valour of her charge, and the sight of the torn tricolour upheld in her little hands. That is what Cigarette hopes for—why not? There will always be a million of commonplace women ready to keep up the decorous traditions of their sex, and sit in safety over their needles by the side of their hearths. One little lioness here and there in a generation cannot do overmuch harm."

Cecil was silent. He would not cross the words of the wounded man by saying what might bring a train of less pleasant thoughts—saying what, in truth, was in his mind, that the future which he had meant for the little Friend of the Flag was not that of any glorious death by combat, but that of a life (unless no bullet early cut its silver cord in twain) when youth should have fled, and have carried for ever with

it her numberless graces, and left in its stead that ribaldry-stained, drink-defiled, hardened, battered, joyless, cruel, terrible thing which is unsightly and repugnant to even the lowest amongst men, which is as the lees of the drunk wine, as the ashes of the burnt-out fires, as the discord of the broken and earth-clogged lyre.

Cigarette was charming now—a fairy-story set into living motion—a fantastic little firework out of an extravaganza, with the impudence of a boy-harlequin and the witching kittenhood of a girl's beauty. But when this youth that made it all fair should have passed (and youth passes soon when thus adrift on the world), when there should be left in its stead only shamelessness, hardihood, vice, weariness—those who found the prettiest jest in her now would be the first to cast aside, with an oath, the charred wrecked rocket-stick of a life from which no golden careless stream of many-coloured fires of coquette caprices would rise and enchant them then.

"Who is it that sent these?" asked Léon Ramon, later on, as his hands still wandered among the flowers: for the moment he was at peace; the ice and the hours of quietude had calmed him.

Cecil told him again.

"What does Cigarette know of her?" he pursued.

"Nothing, except, I believe, she knew that Madame Corona accepted my chess-carvings."

"Ah!" he said, with a smile, "I thought the Little One was jealous, Victor."

"Jealous? Pshaw! Of whom?"

"Of any one you admire—specially of this *grande dame*."

"Absurd!" said Cecil, with a sense of annoyance. "Cigarette is far too bold a little trooper to have any thoughts of those follies; and as for this *grande dame*, as you call her, I shall, in every likelihood, never see her again—unless when the word is given to 'Carry Swords,' or 'Lances,' at the general salute, where she reins her horse beside M. le Maréchal's at a review, as I have seen her this morning."

The keen ear of the sick man caught the inflection of an impatience, of a mortification, in the tone that the speaker himself was unconscious of. He guessed the truth—that Cecil had never felt more restless under the shadow of the Eagles than he had done when he had carried his lance up in the salute as he passed with his regiment the flagstaff where the aristocracy of Algiers had been gathered about the Marshal and his staff, and the azure eyes of Madame la Princesse had glanced carelessly and critically over the long line of grey horses of those Chasseurs d'Afrique amongst whom he rode a *bas-officier*.

"Cigarette is right," said Ramon, with a slight smile again. "Your heart is with your old Order. You are '*aristocrat au bout des ongles*.'"

"Indeed I am not, *mon ami*; I am a mere trooper."

"Now! Well, keep your history as you have always done, if you will. What my friend was matters nothing; I know well what he is, and how true a friend. As for Miladi, she will be best out of your path, Victor. Women! God!—they are so fatal!"

"Does not our folly make their fatality?"

"Not always; not often. The madness may be ours, but they sow it. Ah! do they not know how to rouse and enrage it; how to fan, to burn, to lull, to pierce, to slake, to inflame, to entice, to sting? Heavens! so well they know—that their beauty must come, one thinks, out of hell itself!"

His great eyes gleamed like fire, his hollow chest panted for breath, the sweat stood out on his temples. Cecil sought to soothe him, but his words rushed on with the impetuous course of the passionate memories that arose in him.

"Do you know what brought me here? No! As little as I know what brought you, though we have been close comrades all these years. Well, it was *she*! I was an artist. I had no money, I had few friends; but I had youth, I had ambition, I had, I think, genius, till she killed it. I loved my art with a great love, and I was happy. Even in Paris one can be so happy without wealth, whilst one is young. The mirth of the *Barrière*—the grotesques of the *Halles*—the wooden booths on New Year's Day—the bright midnight crowds under the gaslights—the bursts of music from the gay *cafés*—the grey little nuns flitting through the snow—the *Mardi Gras* and

its old-world fooleries—the summer Sundays under the leaves while we laughed like children—the silent dreams through the length of the Louvre—dreams that went home with us and made our garret bright with their visions! One was happy in them—happy, happy!”

His eyes were still fastened on the blank white wall before him while he spoke, as though the things that his words sketched so faintly were painted in all their vivid colours on the dull blank surface. And so in truth they were, as remembrance pictured all the thousand perished hours of his youth.

“Happy—until she looked at me,” he pursued, while his voice flew in feverish haste over the words. “Why would she not let me be? She had them all in her golden nets; nobles, and princes, and poets, and soldiers, she swept them in far and wide. She had her empire; why must she seek out a man who had but his art and his youth, and steal *those*? Women are so insatiate, look you; though they held all the world, they would not rest if one mote in the air swam in sunshine free of them! It was the first year I touched triumph that I saw her. They began for the first time to speak of me; it was the little painting of Cigarette, as a child of the Army, that did it. Ah, God! I thought myself already so famous! Well, she sent for me to take her picture, and I went. I went and I painted her as Cleopatra—by her wish. Ah! it was a face for Cleopatra—the eyes that burn your youth dead, the lips that kiss your honour blind! A face—my God! how beautiful! She had set her-

self to gain my soul; and as the picture grew, and grew, and grew, so my life grew into hers till I lived only by her breath. Why did she want my life? She had so many! She had rich lives, great lives, grand lives at her bidding; and yet she knew no rest till she had leaned down from her cruel height and had seized mine, that had nothing on earth but the joys of the sun and the dew, and the falling of night, and the dawning of day, that are given to the birds of the fields."

His chest heaved with the spasms that with each throe seemed to tear his frame asunder; still he conquered them, and his words went on, his eyes fastened on the burning white glare of the wall as though all the beauty of this woman glowed afresh there to his sight.

"She was great; no matter her name, she lives still. She was vile; ay, but not in my sight till too late. Why is it that men never love so well as where they love their own ruin? that the heart which is pure never makes ours beat upon it with the rapture sin gives? Through month on month my picture grew, and my passion grew with it, fanned by her hand. She knew that never would a man paint her beauty like one who gave his soul for the price of success. I had my paradise; I was drunk; and I painted as never the colours of mortals painted a woman. I think even she was content; even she, who in her superb arrogance thought she was matchless and deathless. Then came my reward; when

the picture was done, her fancy had changed! A light scorn, a careless laugh, a touch of her fan on my cheek; could I not understand? Was I still such a child? Must I be broken more harshly in to learn to give place? That was all! and at last her lacquais pushed me back with his wand from her gates! What would you? I had not known what a great lady's illicit caprices meant; I was still but a boy! She had killed me; she had struck my genius dead; she had made earth my hell—what of that? She had her beauty eternal in the picture she needed, and the whole city rang with her loveliness as they looked on my work. I have never painted again. I came here. What of that? An artist the less then, the world did not care; a life the less soon, she will not care either!"

Then, as the words ended, a great wave of blood beat back his breath and burst from the pent-up torture of his striving lungs, and stained red the dark and silken masses of his beard. His comrade had seen the hemorrhage many times, yet now he knew, as he had never known before, that this was death.

As he held him upward in his arms, and shouted loud for help, the great luminous eyes of the French soldier looked up at him through their mist with the deep, fond gratitude that beams in the eyes of a dog as it drops down to die, knowing one touch and one voice to the last.

"*You* do not forsake," he murmured, brokenly, while his voice ebbed faintly away as the stream of

his life flowed faster and faster out. "It is over now,—so best! If only I could have seen France once more. France——"

He stretched his arms outward as he spoke with the vain longing of a hopeless love. Then a deep sigh quivered through his lips; his hand strove to close on the hand of his comrade, and his head fell, resting on the flushed blossoms of the rosebuds of Provence.

He was dead.

* * * *

An hour later Cecil left the hospital, seeing and hearing nothing of the gay riot of the town about him, though the folds of many-coloured silk and bunting fluttered across the narrow Moorish streets, and the whole of the populace was swarming through them with the vivacious enjoyment of Paris mingling with the stately picturesque life of Arab habit and custom. He was well used to pain of every sort; his bread had long been the bread of bitterness, and the waters of his draught been of gall. Yet this stroke, though looked for, fell heavily and cut far.

Yonder, in the dead-room, there lay a broken, useless mass of flesh and bone that in the sight of the Bureau Arabe was only a worn-out machine that had paid its due toll to the wars of the Second Empire, and was now valueless; only fit to be cast in to rot, unmourned, in the devouring African soil. But to him that lifeless, useless mass was dear still; was the wreck of the bravest, tenderest, and best-beloved friend that he had found in his adversity.

In Léon Ramon he had found a man whom he had loved, and who had loved him. They had suffered much, and much endured together; their very dissimilarities had seemed to draw them nearer to each other. The gentle impassiveness of the Englishman had been like rest to the ardent impetuosity of the French soldier; the passionate and poetic temperament of the artist-trooper had revealed to Cecil a thousand views of thought and of feeling which had never before then dawned on him. And now that the one lay dead, a heavy, weary sense of loneliness rested on the other. They died around him every day; the fearless, fiery blood of France watered in ceaseless streams the arid, harvestless fields of northern Africa; death was so common, that the fall of a comrade was no more noted by them than the fall of a loose stone that their horse's foot shook down a precipice. Yet this death was very bitter to him; he wondered with a dull sense of aching impatience why no Bedouin bullet, no Arab sabre, had ever found his own life out, and cut his thralls asunder.

The evening had just followed on the glow of the day—evening, more lustrous even than ever, for the houses were all a-glitter with endless lines of coloured lamps and strings of sparkling illuminations, a very sea of bright-hued fire. The noise, the mirth, the sudden swell of music, the pleasure-seeking crowds, all that were about him, served only to make more desolate and more oppressive by their contrast his memories of that life, once gracious, and gifted, and

content with the dower of its youth, ruined by a woman, and now slaughtered here, for no avail and with no honour, by a lance-thrust in a midnight skirmish, which had been unrecorded even in the few lines of the gazette that chronicled the war-news of Algeria.

Passing one of the cafés, a favourite resort of the officers of his own regiment, he saw Cigarette. A sheaf of blue, and white, and scarlet lights flashed with tongues of golden flame over her head, and a great tricolour flag with the brass eagle above it was hanging in the still, hot air from the balcony from which she leaned. Her tunic-skirt was full of bonbons and of crackers that she was flinging down among the crowd whilst she sang, stopping every now and then to exchange some passage of *gaulois* wit with them that made her hearers scream with laughter, whilst behind her was a throng of young officers drinking champagne, eating ices, and smoking, echoing her songs and her satires with enthusiastic voices and stamps of their spurred boot-heels. As he glanced upward, she looked literally in a blaze of luminance, and the wild, mellow tones of her voice ringing out in the "*Rien n'est sacré pour un Sapeur*," sounded like a mockery of that dying-bed beside which they had both so late stood together.

"She has the playfulness of the young leopard, and the cruelty," he thought; with a sense of disgust, forgetting that she did not know what he knew, and that if Cigarette had waited to laugh until death had

passed by she would have never laughed all her life through in the battalions of Africa.

She saw him, as he went beneath her balcony; and she sung all the louder, she flung her sweetmeat missiles with the reckless force of a Roman Carnivalist, she launched bolts of tenfold more audacious raillery at the delighted mob below. Cigarette was "*bon soldat*;" when she was wounded, she wound her scarf round the nerve that ached, and only laughed the gayer.

And he did her that injustice which the best amongst us are apt to do to those whom we do not feel interest enough in to study with that closeness which can alone give comprehension of the intricate and complex rebus, so faintly sketched, so marvellously involved, of human nature.

He thought her a little leopard, in her vivacious play and her inborn bloodthirstiness.

Well, the little leopard of France played recklessly enough that evening. Algiers was *en fête*, and Cigarette was sparkling over the whole of the town like a humming-bird or a firefly—here, and there, and everywhere, in a thousand places at once, as it seemed; staying long with none, making music and mirth with all. Waltzing like a thing possessed, pelting her lovers with a tempest storm of dragées, standing on the head of a gigantic Spahis *en tableau* amidst a shower of fireworks, improvising slang songs worthy of Jean Vadé and his Poissardes, and chorused by a hundred lusty lungs that yelled the

burden in riotous glee as furiously as they were accustomed to shout "En avant!" in assault and in charge, Cigarette made amends to herself at night for her vain self-sacrifice of the fête-day.

She had her wound; yes, it throbbed still now and then, and stung like a bee in the warm core of a rose. But she was young, she was gay, she was a little philosopher, above all she was French, and in the real French blood happiness runs so richly that it will hardly be utterly chilled until the veins freeze in the coldness of death. She enjoyed—enjoyed all the more fiercely, perhaps, because a certain desperate bitterness mingled with the abandonment of her Queen Mab-like revelries. Until now Cigarette had been as absolutely heedless and without a care as any young bird taking its first summer circles downward through the intoxication of the sunny air. It was not without fiery resistance and scornful revolt that the madcap *Figlia del Reggimento* would be prevailed on to admit that any shadow could have power to rest on her.

She played through more than half the night, the agile bounding graceful play of the young leopard to which he had likened her, and with a quick punishment from her velvet-sheathed talons if any durst offend her. Then when the dawn was nigh, leopard-like, the Little One sought her den.

She was most commonly under canvas; but when she was in the town it was at one with the proud independence of her nature that she rejected all

offers made her, and would have her own nook to live in, even though she were not there one hour out of the twenty-four.

"Le Château de Cigarette" was a standing jest of the Army; for none was ever allowed to follow her thither, or to behold the interior of her fortress, and one over-venturous Spahi scaling the ramparts had been rewarded with so hot a deluge of lentile-soup from a boiling casserole poured on his head from above, that he had beaten a hasty and ignominious retreat, which was more than a whole tribe of the most warlike of his countrymen could ever have made him do.

"Le Château de Cigarette" was neither more nor less than a couple of garrets, high in the air, in an old Moorish house, in an old Moorish court, decayed, silent, poverty-struck, with the wild pumpkin thrusting its leaves through the broken fretwork, and the green lizard shooting over the broad pavements, once brilliant in mosaic, that the robes of the princes of Islam had swept, now carpeted deep with the dry white drifted dust, and only crossed by the tottering feet of aged Jews or the laden steps of Algerine women.

Up a long winding rickety stair Cigarette approached her castle, which was very near the sky indeed. "I like the blue," said the châtelaine, laconically, "and the pigeons fly close by my window." And through it, too, she might have added, for though no human thing might invade her château,

the pigeons circling in the sunrise light always knew well there were rice and crumbs spread for them in that eyelet-hole of a casement.

Cigarette threaded her agile way up the dark ladder-like shaft, and opened her door. There was a dim oil-wick burning; the garret was large, and as clean as a palace could be; its occupants were various, and all sound asleep except one, who, rough, and hard, and small, and three-legged, limped up to her and rubbed a little bullet head against her lovingly.

"Bouffarick—p'tit Bouffarick!" returned Cigarette, caressingly, in a whisper; and Bouffarick, content, limped back to a nest of hay, being a little wiry dog that had lost a leg in one of the most famous battles of Oran, and lain in its dead master's breast through three days and nights on the field. Cigarette, shading the lamp with one hand, glanced round on her family.

They had all histories—histories in the French Army, which was the only history she considered of any import to the universe. There was a raven perched high, by name Vole-qui-Veut: he was a noted character amongst the Zouaves, and had made many a campaign riding on his owner's bayonet; he loved a combat, and was specially famed for screaming "*Tue! tue! tue!*" all over a battle-field; he was very grey now, and the Zouave's bones had long bleached on the edge of the desert.

There was a tame rat who was a *vieille moustache*, and who had lived many years in a Lignard's pocket,

and munched waifs and strays of the military rations, until the enormous crime being discovered that it was taught to sit up and dress its whiskers to the heinous air of the *Marseillaise*, the Lignard got the *matraque*, and the rat was condemned to be killed, had not Cigarette dashed in to the rescue and carried the long-tailed revolutionist off in safety.

There was a big white cat curled in a ball, who had been the darling of a Tringlo, and had travelled all over North Africa on the top of his mule's back, seven seasons through; in the eighth the Tringlo was picked off by a flying shot, and an Indigène was about to skin the shrieking Boule Blanche for the soup-pot, when a bullet broke his wrist, making him drop the cat with a yell of pain, and the Friend of the Flag, catching it up, laughed in his face: "A lead comfit instead of slaughter-soup, my friend!"

There was little Bouffarick and three other brother-dogs of equal celebrity, one, in especial, who had been brought from Châlons, in defiance of the regulations, inside the drum of his regiment, and had been wounded a dozen times, always seeking the hottest heat of the skirmish. And there was, besides these, sleeping serenely on a straw palliasse, a very old man with a snowy beard and a head fit for Gerome to give to an Abraham.

A very old man—one who had been a conscript in the bands of Young France, and marched from his Pyrennean village to the battle tramp of the *Marseillaise*, and charged with the *Enfans de Paris* across

the plains of Gemappes; who had known the passage of the Alps, and lifted the long curls from the dead brow of Désaix at Marengo, and seen in the sultry noonday dust of a glorious summer the Guard march into Paris, while the people laughed and wept with joy, surging like the mighty sea around one pale frail form, so young by years, so absolute by genius.

A very old man; long broken with poverty, with pain, with bereavement, with extreme old age; and, by a long course of cruel accidents, alone, here in Africa, without one left of the friends of his youth, or of the children of his name, and deprived even of the charities due from his country to his services—alone save for the little Friend of the Flag, who, for four years, had kept him on the proceeds of her wine trade in this Moorish attic, tending him herself when in the town, taking heed that he should want for nothing when she was campaigning.

“I will have a care of him,” she had said, curtly, when she had found him in great misery and learned his history from others; and she had had the care accordingly, maintaining him at her own cost in the Moorish building, and paying a good Jewess of the quarter to tend him when she was not herself in Algiers.

The old man was almost dead, mentally, though in bodily strength still well able to know the physical comforts of food, and rest, and attendance; he was in his second childhood, in his ninetieth year, and was unconscious of the debt he owed her; even, with a

curious caprice of decrepitude, he disliked her, and noticed nothing except the raven when it shrieked its "*Tue! tue! tue!*" But to Cigarette he was as sacred as a god; had he not fought beneath the glance, and gazed upon the face, of the First Consul?

She bent over him now, saw that he slept, busied herself noiselessly in brewing a little tin pot full of coffee and hot milk, set it over the lamp to keep it warm, and placed it beside him ready for his morning meal, with a roll of white wheat bread; then, with a glance round to see that her other dependents wanted for nothing, went to her own garret adjoining, and with the lattice fastened back, that the first rays of sunrise and the first white flash of her friends the pigeons' gleaming wings might awaken her, threw herself on her straw and slept with all the graceful careless rest of the childhood which though in one sense she had never known, yet in another had never forsaken her.

She hid as her lawless courage would not have stooped to hide a sin, had she chosen to commit one, this compassion which she, the young condottiera of Algeria, showed with so tender a charity to the soldier of Bonaparte. To him, moreover, her fiery imperious voice was gentle as the dove, her wayward dominant will was pliant as the reed, her contemptuous sceptic spirit was reverent as a child's before an altar. In her sight the survivor of the Army of Italy was sacred; sacred the eyes which, when full of light, had seen the sun glitter on the squadrons

of the Hussars of Murat, the Dragoons of Kellerman, the Cuirassiers of Milhaud ; sacred the hands which when nervous with youth, had borne the standard of the Republic victorious against the gathered Teuton host in the Thermopylæ of Champagne ; sacred the ears which, when quick to hear, had heard the thunder of Arcola, of Lodi, of Rivoli, and, above even the tempest of war, the clear still voice of Napoléon ; sacred the lips which, when their beard was dark in the fulness of manhood, had quivered, as with a woman's weeping, at the farewell, in the spring night, in the moonlit Cour des Adieux.

Cigarette had a religion of her own ; and followed it more closely than most disciples follow other creeds.

CHAPTER X.

"MILADI AUX BEAUX YEUX BLEUS."

EARLY that morning, when the snowy cloud of pigeons were circling down to take their daily alms from Cigarette, where her bright brown face looked out from the lattice-hole, Cecil, with some of the roughriders of his regiment, was sent far into the interior to bring in a string of colts, bought of a friendly desert tribe, and destined to be shipped to France for the Imperial Haras. The mission took two days; early on the third they returned with the string of wild young horses, whom it had taken not a little exertion and address to conduct successfully through the country into Algiers.

He was usually kept in incessant activity, because those in command over him had quickly discovered

the immeasurable value of a *bas-officier* who was certain to enforce and obtain implicit obedience, and certain to execute any command given him with perfect address and surety, yet who, at the same time, was adored by his men, and had acquired a most singularly advantageous influence over them. But of this he was always glad : throughout his twelve years' service under the Emperor's flag, he had only found those moments in which he was unemployed intolerable ; he would willingly have been in saddle from dawn till midnight.

Châteauroy was himself present when the colts were taken into the stable-yard ; and himself inquired, without the medium of any third person, the whole details of the sale and of the transit. It was impossible, with all his inclination, to find any fault either with the execution of the errand or with the brief respectful answers by which his Corporal replied to his rapid and imperious cross-questionings. There were a great number of men within hearing, many of them the most daring and rebellious *pratiques* of the regiment ; and Cecil would have let the coarsest upbraidings scourge him, rather than put the temptation to mutiny in their way which one insubordinate or even not strictly deferential word from him would have given. Hence the inspection passed off peaceably ; as the Marquis turned on his heel, however, he paused a moment.

"Victor !"

“*Mon Commandant ?*”

“I have not forgotten your insolence with those ivory toys. But Madame la Princesse herself has deigned to solicit that it shall be passed over unpunished. She cannot, of course, yield to your impertinent request to remain also unpaid for them. I charged myself with the fulfilment of her wishes. You deserve the *matraque*, but since Miladi herself is lenient enough to pardon you, you are to take this instead. Hold your hand, sir !”

Cecil put out his hand ; he expected to receive a heavy blow from his commander’s sabre, that possibly might break the wrist. These little trifles were common in Africa.

Instead, a *rouleau* of Napoléons was laid on his open palm. Châteauroy knew the gold would sting more than the blow.

For the moment Cecil had but one impulse—to dash the pieces in the giver’s face. In time to restrain the impulse, he caught sight of the wild eager hatred gleaming in the eyes of Rake, of Petit Picpon, of a score of others who loved him and cursed their Colonel, and would at one signal from him have sheathed their sword in the mighty frame of the Marquis, though they should have been fired down the next moment themselves for the murder. The warning of Cigarette came to his memory ; his hand clasped on the gold ; he gave the salute calmly as Châteauroy swung himself away.

The troopers looked at him with longing question-

ing eyes ; they knew enough of him by now to know the bitterness such gold, so given, had for him. Any other, even a corporal, would have been challenged with a storm of raillery, a volley of congratulation, and would have had shouted or hissed after him opprobrious accusations of “*faisant suisse*” if he had not forthwith treated his comrades royally from such largesse. With Bel-à-faire-peur they held their peace ; they kept the silence which they saw that he wished to keep, as, his hour of liberty being come, he went slowly out of the great court with the handful of Napoléons thrust in the folds of his sash.

Rather unconsciously than by premeditation his steps turned through the streets that led to his old familiar haunt, the As de Pique, and dropping down on a bench under the awning, he asked for a draught of water. It was brought him at once, the hostess, a quick brown little woman from Paris, whom the lovers of Eugène Sue called Rigolette, adding of her own accord a lump of ice and a slice or two of lemon, for which she vivaciously refused payment, though generosity was by no means her cardinal virtue.

“Bel - à - faire - peur” awakened general interest through Algiers ; he brought so fiery and so daring a reputation with him from the wars and raids of the interior, yet he was so calm, so grave, so gentle, so listless ; it was known that he had made himself the terror of Kabyle and Bedouin, yet here in the city he thanked the negro boy who took him a glass of

lemonade at an estaminet, and sharply rebuked one of his men for knocking down an old colon with a burden of gourds and of melons; such a Roumi as this the good people of the Franco-African capital held as a perfect gift of the gods, and not understanding one whit, nevertheless fully appreciated.

He did not look at the newspapers she offered him; but sat gazing out from the tawny awning, like the sail of a Neapolitan felucca, down the chequered shadows and the many-coloured masses of the little crooked, rambling, semi-barbaric alley. He was thinking of the Napoléons in his sash and of the promise he had pledged to Cigarette. That he would keep it he was resolved. The few impressive vivid words of the young vivandière had painted before him like a picture the horrors of mutiny and its hopelessness; rather than that, through him, these should befall the men who had become his brethren-in-arms, he felt ready to let the Black Hawk do his worst on his own life. Yet a weariness, a bitterness, he had never known in the excitement of active service came on him, brought by this sting of insult from the fair hand of an *aristocrate*.

There was absolutely no hope possible in his future. The uttermost that could ever come to him would be a grade something higher in the army that now enrolled him; the gift of the cross, or a post in the bureau. Algerine warfare was not like the campaigns of the armies of Italy or the Rhine, and there was no Napoléon here to discern with unerring omni-

science a leader's genius under the képi of a common trooper. Though he should show the qualities of a Massena or a Kléber, the chances were a million to one that he would never get even so much as a lieutenancy; and the raids on the decimated tribes, the obscure skirmishes of the interior, though terrible in slaughter and venturesome enough, were not the fields on which great military successes were won and great military honours acquired. The French fought for a barren strip of brown plateau that, gained, would be of little use or profit to them; he thought that he did much the same, that his future was much like those arid sand-plains, those thirsty verdureless stretches of burnt earth—very little worth the reaching.

The heavy folds of a Bedouin's haick brushing the papers off the bench, broke the thread of his musings. As he stooped for them, he saw that one was an English journal some weeks old. His own name caught his eye—the named buried so utterly, whose utterance in the Sheik's tent had struck him like a dagger's thrust. The flickering light and darkness, as the awning waved to and fro, made the lines move dizzily upwards and downwards as he read—read the short paragraph touching the fortunes of the race that had disowned him:

"THE ROYALLIEU SUCCESSION.—We regret to learn that the Right Hon. Viscount Royallieu, who so lately succeeded to the family title on his father's death, has expired at Mentone, whither his health

had induced him to go some months previous. The late Lord was unmarried. His next brother was, it will be remembered, many years ago, killed on a southern railway. The title, therefore, now falls to the third and only remaining son, the Hon. Berkeley Cecil, who, having lately inherited considerable properties from a distant relative, will, we believe, revive all the old glories of this Peerage, which have, from a variety of causes, lost somewhat of their ancient brilliancy."

Cecil sat quite still, as he had sat looking down on the record of his father's death, when Cigarette had rallied him with her gay challenge among the Moresco ruins. His face flushed hotly under the warm golden hue of the desert bronze, then lost all its colour as suddenly, till it was as pale as any of the ivory he carved. The letters of the paper reeled and wavered and grew misty before his eyes; he lost all sense of the noisy changing polyglot crowd thronging past him; he, a common soldier in the Algerian Cavalry, knew that, by every law of birthright, he was now a Peer of England.

His first thought was for the dead man. True, there had been little amity, little intimacy, between them; a negligent friendliness whenever they had met had been all that they had ever reached. But in their childhood they had been carelessly kind to one another, and the memory of the boy who had once played beside him down the old galleries and under

the old forests, of the man who had now died yonder where the southern seaboard lay across the warm blue Mediterranean, was alone on him for the moment. His thoughts had gone back, with a pang, almost ere he had read the opening lines, to autumn mornings in his youngest years when the leaves had been flushed with their earliest red, and the brown still pools had been alive with water-birds, and the dogs had dropped down charging among the flags and rushes, and his brother's boyish face had laughed on him from the wilderness of willows, and his brother's boyish hands had taught him to handle his first cartridge, and to fire his first shot. The many years of indifference and estrangement were forgotten, the few years of childhood's confidence and comradeship alone remembered, as he saw the words that brought him in his exile the story of his brethren's fate and of his race's fortunes. His head sank, his face was still colourless, he sat motionless with the printed sheet in his hand. Once his eyes flashed, his breath came fast and uneven; he rose with a sudden impulse, with a proud bold instinct of birth and freedom. Let him stand here in what grade he would, with the badge of a Corporal of the Army of Africa on his arm, this inheritance that had come to him was his; he bore the name and the title of his house as surely as any had ever borne it since the first of the Norman owners of Royallieu had followed the Bastard's banner.

The vagabond throngs, Moorish, Frank, negro, colon, paused as they pushed their way over the un-

even road, and stared at him vacantly where he stood. There was something in his attitude, in his look, which swept over them seeing none of them, in the eager lifting of his head, in the excited fire in his eyes, that arrested all, from the dullest muleteer plodding on with his string of patient beasts, to the most volatile French girl laughing on her way with a group of *fantassins*. He did not note them, hear them, think of them; the whole of the Algerine scene had faded out as if it had no place before him; he had forgot that he was a cavalry soldier of the Empire; he saw nothing but the green wealth of the old home woods far away in England; he remembered nothing save that he, and he alone, was the rightful Lord of Royallieu.

“*Tiens, es-tu fou, mon brave ? Bois de m’avoine,* Bel-à-faire-peur !*”

The coarse good-humoured challenge, as the hand of a broad-chested black-visaged veteran of Chasseurs fell on his shoulder, and the wooden rim of a little wine-cup was thrust towards him with the proffered drink, startled him and recalled him to the consciousness of where he was. He stared one moment absently in the trooper’s amazed face, then shook him off with a suddenness that tossed back the cup to the ground, and, holding the journal clenched close in his grasp, went swiftly through the masses of the people out and away, he little noted where, till he had forced his road beyond the gates, beyond the town, beyond all

* Brandy.

reach of its dust and its babble and its discord, and was alone in the further outskirts, where to the north the calm sunlit bay slept peacefully with a few scattered ships riding at anchor, and southward the luxuriance of the Sahel stretched to meet the wide and cheerless plateaux, dotted with the conical houses of hair, and desolate as though the locust-swarm had just alighted there to lay them waste.

Reaching the heights he stood still involuntarily, and looked down once more on the words that told him of his birthright; in the blinding intense light of the African day they seemed to stand out as though carved in stone, and as he read them once more a great darkness passed over his face;—this heritage was his, and he could never take it up; this thing had come to him, and he must never claim it. He was Viscount Royallieu as surely as any of his fathers had been so before him, and he was dead for ever in the world's belief; he must live, and grow old, and perish by shot or steel, by sickness or by age, with his name and his rights buried, and his years passed as a private soldier of France.

The momentary glow which had come to him with the sudden resurrection of hope and of pride faded utterly as he slowly read and re-read the lines of the journal on the broken terraces of the hill-side, where the great fig-trees spread their fantastic shadows, and through a rocky channel a russet stream of shallow waters threaded its downward path under the reeds, and no living thing was near him save some quiet

browsing herds far off, and their Arab shepherd-lad that an artist might have sketched as Ishmael. What his future might have been rose before his thoughts; what it must be rose also, bitterly, blackly, drearily in contrast. A noble without even a name; a chief of his race without even the power to claim kinship with that race; owner by law of three thousand broad English acres; yet an exile without freedom to set foot on his native land; by heritage one amongst the aristocracy of England, by circumstance, now and for ever, till an Arab bullet should cut in twain his thread of life, a soldier of the African legions, bound to obey the commonest and coarsest boor that had risen to a rank above him: this was what he knew himself to be, and knew that he must continue to be without one appeal against it, without once stretching out his hand towards his right of birth and station.

There was a passionate revolt, a bitter heart-sickness on him; all the old freedom and peace and luxury and pleasure of the life he had left so long allured him with a terrible temptation; the honours of the rank that he should now have filled were not what he remembered; what he longed for with an agonised desire was to stand once more stainless among his equals, to reach once more the liberty of unchallenged unfettered life, to return once more to those who held him but as a dishonoured memory, as one whom violent death had well snatched from the shame of a criminal career.

"But who would believe me now?" he thought.

"Besides, this makes no difference. If three words spoken would reinstate me, I could not speak them at that cost. The beginning perhaps was folly, but for sheer justice sake there is no drawing back now. Let him enjoy it; God knows *I* do not grudge him it."

Yet though it was true to the very core that no envy and no evil lay in his heart against the younger brother to whose lot had fallen all good gifts of men and fate, there was almost unbearable anguish on him in this hour in which he learned the inheritance that had come to him, and remembered that he could never take again even so much of it as lay in the name of his fathers. When he had given his memory up to slander and oblivion and the shadow of a great shame, when he had let his life die out from the world that had known him, and buried it beneath the rough, weather-stained, blood-soaked cloth of a private soldier's uniform, he had not counted the cost then nor foreseen the cost hereafter. It had fallen on him very heavily now.

Where he stood under some sheltered columns of a long-ruined mosque whose shafts were bound together by a thousand withes and wreaths of the rich fantastic Sahel foliage, an exceeding weariness of longing was upon him—longing for all that he had forfeited, for all that was his own, yet never could be claimed as his.

The day was intensely still; there was not a sound except when here and there the movement of a lizard

under the dry grasses gave a low crackling rustle. He wondered almost which was the dream and which the truth; that old life that he had once led, and that looked now so far away and so unreal, or this which had been about him for so many years in the camps and the bivouacs, the barracks and the battle-fields. He wondered almost which he himself was—an English Peer on whom the title of his line had fallen, or a Corporal of Chasseurs who must take his chief's insults as patiently as a cur takes the blows of its master; that he was *both*, seemed to him, as he stood there with the glisten of the sea before and the swelling slopes of the hill-side above, a vague distorted nightmare.

Hours might have passed, or only moments, he could not have told; his eyes looked blankly out at the sun-glow, his hand instinctively clenched on the journal whose stray lines had told him in an Algerine *trattoria* that he had inherited what he never could enjoy.

"Are *they* content, I wonder?" he thought, gazing down that fiery blaze of shadowless light; "do they ever remember?"

He thought of those for whose sakes he had become what he was.

The distant mellow ringing notes of a trumpet-call floated to his ear from the town at his feet; it was sounding the "*rentrée en caserne*." Old instinct, long habit, made him start and shake his harness to-

gether and listen. The trumpet-blast winding cheerily from afar off recalled him to the truth, summoned him sharply back from vain regrets to the facts of daily life. It woke him as it wakes a sleeping charger; it roused him as it rouses a wounded trooper.

He stood hearkening to the familiar music till it had died away, spirited, yet still lingering; full of fire, yet fading softly down the wind. He listened till the last echo ceased; then he tore the paper that he held in strips, and let it float away, drifting down the yellow current of the reedy river-channel; and he half drew from its scabbard the sabre whose blade had been notched and dented and stained in many midnight skirmishes and many headlong charges under the desert suns, and looked at it as though a friend's eye gazed at him in the gleam of the trusty steel. And his soldier-like philosophy, his campaigner's carelessness, his habitual easy negligence that had sometimes been weak as water and sometimes heroic as martyrdom, came back to him with a deeper shadow on it, that was grave with a calm, resolute, silent courage.

"So best after all, perhaps," he said, half aloud, in the solitude of the ruined and abandoned mosque. "He cannot well come to shipwreck with such a fair wind and such a smooth sea. And I—I am just as well here. To ride with the Chasseurs is more exciting than to ride with the Pytchley; and the rules of the Chambrée are scarce more tedious than the

rules of a Court. Nature turned me out for a soldier, though Fashion spoiled me for one. I can make a good campaigner—I should never make anything else.”

And he let his sword drop back again into the scabbard, and quarrelled no more with fate.

His hand touched the thirty gold pieces in his sash.

He started, as the recollection of the forgotten insult came back on him. He stood awhile in thought; then he took his resolve.

A half-hour of quick movement, for he had become used to the heat as an Arab, and heeded it as little, brought him before the entrance-gates of the Villa Aïoussa. A native of Soudan, in a rich dress, who had the office of porter, asked him politely his errand. Every *indigène* learns by hard experience to be courteous to a French soldier. Cecil simply asked, in answer, if Madame la Princesse were visible. The negro returned, cautiously, that she was at home, but doubted her being accessible. “You come from M. le Marquis?” he inquired.

“No; on my own errand.”

“You!” Not all the native African awe of a *Roumi* could restrain the contemptuous amaze in the word.

“I. Ask if Corporal Victor, of the Chasseurs, can be permitted a moment’s interview with your mistress. I come by permission,” he added, as the native

hesitated between his fear of a Roumi and his sense of the appalling unfittingness of a private soldier seeking an audience of a Spanish Princess. The message was passed about between several of the household; at last a servant of higher authority appeared :

"Madame permitted Corporal Victor to be taken to her presence. Would he follow?"

He uncovered his head and entered, passing through several passages and chambers, richly hung and furnished; for the villa had been the "campagne" of an illustrious French personage, who had offered it to the Princess Corona when, for some slight delicacy of health, the air of Algeria was advocated. A singular sensation came on him, half of familiarity, half of strangeness, as he advanced along them; for twelve years he had seen nothing but the bare walls of barrack-rooms, the goat-skin of douars, and the canvas of his own camp-tent. To come once more, after so long an interval, amidst the old things of luxury and grace that had been so long unseen, wrought curiously on him. He could not fairly disentangle past and present. For the moment, as his feet fell once more on soft carpets, and his eyes glanced over gold and silver, malachite and bronze, white silk and violet damasks, he almost thought the Algerian years were a disordered dream of the night.

His spur caught in the yielding carpet, and his sabre clashed slightly against it; as the *rentrée au caserne* had done an hour before, the sound re-

called the actual present to him. He was but a French soldier, who went on sufferance into the presence of a great lady. All the rest was dead and buried.

Some half-dozen apartments, large and small, were crossed; then into that presence he was ushered. The room was deeply shaded, and fragrant with the odours of the innumerable flowers of the Sahel soil; there was that about it which struck on him as some air, long unheard but once intimately familiar, on the ear will revive innumerable memories; like the "*vieil air languissant et funèbre*," for which Gerard de Nerval was willing to give "all Rossini and Weber." She was at some distance from him, with the trailing draperies of eastern fabrics falling about her in a rich, unbroken, shadowy cloud of melting colour, through which, here and there, broke threads of gold; involuntarily he paused on the threshold looking at her. Some faint, far-off remembrance stirred in him, but deep down in the closed grave of his past; some vague intangible association of forgotten days, forgotten thoughts, drifted before him as it had drifted before him when first in the *Chambrée* of his barracks he had beheld the *Venetia Corona*.

She moved forward as her servant announced him; she saw him pause there like one spell-bound, and thought it the hesitation of one who felt sensitively his own low grade in life. She came towards him with the silent sweeping grace that gave her the

carriage of an empress ; her voice fell on his ear with the accent of a woman immeasurably proud, but too proud not to bend softly and graciously to those who were so far beneath her that without such aid from her they could never have addressed or have approached her.

"You have come, I trust, to withdraw your prohibition ? Nothing will give me greater pleasure than to bring his Majesty's notice to one of the best soldiers his Army holds."

There was that in the words, gently as they were spoken, that recalled him suddenly to himself ; they had that negligent, courteous pity she would have shown to some colon begging at her gates ! He forgot—forgot utterly—that he was only an African trooper. He only remembered that he had once been a gentleman, that—if a life of honour and of self-negation can make any so—he was one still. He advanced and bowed with the old serene elegance that his bow had once been famed for ; and she, well used to be even over-critical in such trifles, thought, "That man has once lived in courts !"

"Pardon me, Madame, I do not come to trespass so far upon your benignity," he answered, as he bent before her. "I come to express, rather, my regret that you should have made one signal error."

"Error !"—a haughty surprise glanced from her eyes as they swept over him. Such a word had never been used to her in the whole course of her

brilliant and pampered life of sovereignty and indulgence.

"One common enough, Madame, in your Order. The error to suppose that under the rough cloth of a private trooper's uniform there cannot possibly be such aristocratic monopolies as nerves to wound."

"I do not comprehend you." She spoke very coldly; she repented her profoundly of her concession in admitting a *Chasseur d'Afrique* to her presence.

"Possibly not. Mine was the folly to dream that you would ever do so. I should not have intruded on you now, but for this reason: the humiliation you were pleased to pass on me I could neither refuse nor resent to the dealer of it. Had I done so, men who are only too loyal to me would have resented with me, and been thrashed or been shot, as payment. I was compelled to accept it, and to wait until I could return your gift to you. I have no right to complain that you pained me with it, since one who occupies my position ought, I presume, to consider remembrance, even by an outrage, an honour done to him by the Princess Corona."

As he said the last words he laid on a table that stood near him the gold of Châteauroy's insult. She had listened with a bewildered wonder, held in check by the haughtier impulse of offence, that a man in this grade could venture thus to address, thus to arraign her. His words were totally incomprehensible to her, though, by the grave rebuke of his manner, she saw that they were fully meant, and, as

he considered, fully authorised by some wrong done to him. As he laid the gold pieces down upon her table, an idea of the truth came to her.

"I know nothing of what you complain of; I sent you no money. What is it you would imply?" she asked him, looking up from where she leaned back in the low couch into whose depths she had sunk as he had spoken.

"You did not send me these? Not as payment for the chess service?"

"Assuredly not. After what you said the other day, I should have scarcely been so ill-bred and so heedless of inflicting pain. Who used my name thus?"

His face lightened with a pleasure and a relief that changed it wonderfully; that brighter look of gladness had been a stranger to it for so many years.

"You give me infinite happiness, Madame. You little dream how bitter such slights are where one has lost the power to resent them! It was M. de Châteauroy, who this morning——"

"Dared to tell you I sent you those coins?"

The serenity of a courtly woman of the world was unbroken, but her blue and brilliant eyes darkened and gleamed beneath the sweep of their lashes.

"Perhaps I can scarcely say so much. He gave them, and he implied that he gave them from you. The words he spoke were these."

He told her them as they had been uttered, adding no more; she saw the construction they had been intended to bear, and that which they had borne naturally to his ear; she listened earnestly to the end. Then she turned to him with the exquisite softness of grace which, when she was moved to it, contrasted so vividly with the haughty and almost chill languor of her habitual manner.

"Believe me, I regret deeply that you should have been wounded by this most coarse indignity; I grieve sincerely that through myself in any way it should have been brought upon you. As for the perpetrator of it, M. de Châteauroy will be received here no more; and it shall be my care that he learns not only how I resent his unpardonable use of my name, but how I esteem his cruel outrage to a defender of his own Flag. You did exceedingly well and wisely to acquaint me; in your treatment of it as an affront that I was without warrant to offer you, you showed the just indignation of a soldier, and—of what I am very sure that you are—a gentleman."

He bowed low before her.

"Madame, you have made me the debtor of my enemy's outrage. Those words from you are more than sufficient compensation for it."

"A poor one, I fear! Your Colonel is your enemy, then? And wherefore?"

He paused a moment:

"Why at first I scarcely know. We are antagonistic, I suppose."

"But is it usual for officers of his high grade to show such malice to their soldiers?"

"Most unusual. In this service especially so; although officers rising from the ranks themselves are more apt to contract prejudices and ill-feeling against, as they are to feel favouritism to, their men, than where they enter the regiment in a superior grade at once. At least, that is the opinion I myself have formed, studying the working of the different systems."

"You know the English service, then?"

"I know something of it."

"And still, though thinking this, you prefer the French?"

"I distinctly prefer it, as one that knows how to make fine soldiers, and how to reward them; as one in which a brave man will be valued, and a worn-out veteran will not be left to die like a horse at a knacker's."

"A brave man valued, and yet you are a corporal!" thought Miladi, as he pursued:

"Since I am here, Madame, let me thank you, in the Army's name, for your infinite goodness in acting so munificently on my slight hint. Your generosity has made many happy hearts in the hospital."

"Generosity! Oh, do not call it by any such

name! What did it cost me? We are terribly selfish here. I am indebted to you that for once you made me remember those who suffered."

She spoke with a certain impulse of candour and of self-accusation that broke with great sweetness the somewhat careless coldness of her general manner; it was like a gleam of light that showed all the depth and the warmth that in truth lay beneath that imperial languor of habit. It broke further the ice of distance that severed the *grande dame* from the cavalry soldier.

Insensibly to himself, the knowledge that he had, in fact, the right to stand before her as an equal gave him the bearing of one who exercised that right, and her rapid perception had felt before now that this *Roumi* of Africa was as true a gentleman as any that had ever thronged about her in palaces. Her own life had been an uninterrupted course of luxury, prosperity, serenity, and power: the adversity which she could not but perceive had weighed on his had a strange interest to her. She had heard of many calamities, and aided many; but they had always been far sundered from her, they had never touched her: in this man's presence they seemed to grow very close, terribly real. She led him on to speak of his comrades, of his daily life, of his harassing routine of duties in peace, and of his various experiences in war. He told her, too, of Léon Ramon's history; and as she listened, he saw

a mist arise and dim the brilliancy of those eyes that men complained would never soften. The very fidelity with which he sketched to her the bitter sufferings and the rough nobility (that were momentarily borne and seen in that great military family of which he had become a son by adoption, interested her by its very unlikeness to anything in her own world.

His voice had still its old sweetness, his manner still its old grace; and added to these were a grave earnestness and a natural eloquence that the darkness of his own fortunes and the sympathies with others that pain had awakened had brought to him. He wholly forgot their respective stations; he only remembered that for the first time for so many years he had the charm of converse with a woman of high breeding, of inexpressible beauty, and of keen and delicate intuition. He wholly forgot how time passed, and she did not seek to remind him; indeed, she but little noted it herself.

At last the conversation turned back to his Chief.

"You seem to be aware of some motive for your commandant's dislike?" she asked him. "Tell me to what you attribute it?"

"It is a long tale, Madame."

"No matter, I would hear it."

"I fear it will only weary you?"

"Do not fear that. Tell it mē?"

He obeyed, and told to her the story of the Emir

and of the Pearl of the Desert ; and Venetia Corona listened, as she had listened to him throughout, with an interest that she rarely vouchsafed to the recitals and the witticisms of her own circle. He gave to the narrative a soldierly simplicity, and a picturesque colouring that lent a new interest to her ; and she was of that nature which, however it may be led to conceal feeling from pride and from hatred, never fails to awaken to indignant sympathy at wrong.

“ This barbarian is your chief ? ” she said, as the tale closed. “ His enmity is your honour ! I can well credit that he will never pardon your having stood between him and his crime.”

“ He has never pardoned it yet, of a surety.”

“ I will not tell you it was a noble action,” she said, with a smile sweet as the morning, a smile that few saw light on them. “ It came too naturally to a man of honour for you to care for the epithet. Yet it was a great one a most generous one. But I have not heard one thing :—what argument did you use to obtain her release ? ”

“ No one has ever heard it,” he answered her, while his voice sank low. “ I will trust you with it ; it will not pass elsewhere. I told him enough of—of my own past life to show him that I knew what his had been, and that I knew moreover, though they were dead to me now, men in that greater world of Europe who would believe my statement if I wrote them his outrage on the Emir, and would

avenge it for the reputation of the Empire. And unless he released the Emir's wife, I swore to him that I would so write, though he had me shot on the morrow; and he knew I should keep my word."

She was silent some moments, looking on him with a musing gaze, in which some pity and more honour for him were blended.

"You told him your past. Will you confess it to me?"

"I cannot, Madame."

"And why?"

"Because I am dead! Because, in your presence, it becomes more bitter to me to remember that I ever lived."

"You speak strangely. Cannot your life have a resurrection?"

"Never, Madame. For a brief hour you have given it one—in dreams. It will have no other."

"But surely there may be ways,—such a story as you have told me brought to the Emperor's knowledge, you would see your enemy disgraced, yourself honoured?"

"Possibly, Madame. But it is out of the question that it should ever be so brought. As I am now, so I desire to live and die."

"You voluntarily condemn yourself to this?"

"I have voluntarily chosen it. I am well sure that the silence I entreat will be kept by you?"

“Assuredly; unless by your wish it be broken. Yet,—I await my brother’s arrival here; he is a soldier himself; I shall hope that he will persuade you to think differently of your future. At any rate, both his and my own influence will always be exerted for you, if you will avail yourself of it.”

“You do me much honour, Madame. All I will ever ask of you is to return those coins to my Colonel, and to forget that your gentleness has made *me* forget, for one merciful half-hour, the sufferance on which alone a private trooper can present himself here.”

He swept the ground with his képi as though it were the plumed hat of a Marshal, and backed slowly from her presence, as he had many a time long before backed out of a throne-room.

As he went, his eyes caught the armies of the ivory chessmen; they stood under glass, and had not been broken by her lapdog.

Miladi, left alone there in her luxurious morning-room, sat awhile lost in thought. He attracted her; he interested her; he aroused her sympathy and her wonder as the men of her own world had failed to do—aroused them despite the pride which made her impatient of lending so much attention to a mere Chasseur d’Afrique. His knowledge of the fact that he was in reality the representative of his race, although the power to declare himself so had been for ever abandoned and lost, had given him in her presence that day a certain melancholy, and a certain grave

dignity, that would have shown a far more superficial observer than she was that he had come of a great race, and had memories that were of a very different hue to the coarse and hard life which he led now. She had seen much of the world, and was naturally far more penetrative and more correct in judgment than are most women. She discovered the ring of true gold in his words, and the carriage of pure breeding in his actions. He interested her;—more than it pleased her that he should. A man so utterly beneath her!—doubtless brought into the grade to which he had fallen by every kind of error, of improvidence, of folly, of probably worse than folly!

It was too absurd that she, so difficult to interest, so inaccessible, so fastidious, so satiated with all that was brilliant and celebrated, should find herself seriously spending her thoughts, her pity, and her speculation on an adventurer of the African Army! She laughed a little at herself as she stretched out her hand for a new volume of French poems dedicated to her by their accomplished writer, who was a Parisian diplomatist.

"One would imagine I was just out of a convent, and weaving a marvellous romance from a mystery and a *tristesse*, because the first soldier I notice in Algeria has a gentleman's voice and is ill-treated by his officers!" she thought, with a smile, while she opened the poems which had that day arrived, radiant in the creamy vellum, the white velvet, and the gold

of a dedication copy, with the coronet of the Corona d'Amägué on their binding. The poems were sparkling with all the grace of airy *vers de société* and elegant silvery harmonies; but they served ill to chain her attention, for whilst she read her eyes wandered at intervals to the chess battalions.

"Such a man as that buried in the ranks of this brutalised army!" she mused. "What fatal chance could bring him here? Misfortune, not misconduct, surely. I wonder if Lyon could learn! He shall try."

"Your Chasseur has the air of a Prince, my love," said a voice behind her.

"Equivocal compliment! A much better air than most Princes," said Madame Corona, glancing up with a slight shrug of her shoulders, as her guest and travelling companion, the Marquise de Rénardière, entered.

"Indeed! I saw him as he passed out; and he saluted me as if he had been a Marshal. Why did he come?"

Venetia Corona pointed to the Napoléons, and told the story; rather listlessly and briefly.

"Ah! The man has been a gentleman, I dare say. So many of them come to our army. I remember General Villefleur's telling me—he commanded here awhile—that the ranks of the Zéphyr and Zouaves were full of well-born men, utterly good-for-nothing, the handsomest scoundrels possible, who had every gift and every grace, and yet come to no

better end than a pistol-shot in a ditch or a mortal thrust from Bedouin steel. I dare say your Corporal is one of them."

"It may be so."

"But you doubt it, I imagine."

"I am not sure that I do. But this person is certainly unlike a man to whom disgrace has ever attached."

"You think your protégé, then, has become what he is through adversity, I suppose? Very interesting!"

"I really can tell you nothing of his antecedents. Through his skill at sculpture, and my notice of it, considerable indignity has been brought upon him; and a soldier can feel, it seems, though it is very absurd that he should! That is all my concern with the matter, except that I have to teach his commander not to play with my name in his barrack-yard."

She spoke with that negligence which always sounded very cold, though the words were so gently spoken. Her best and most familiar friends always knew when, with that courtly chillness, she had signed them their line of demarcation.

And the Marquise de Rénardière said no more, but talked of the Ambassador's poems.

CHAPTER XI.

"LE BON-ZIG."

MEANWHILE, the subject of their first discourse returned to the *Chambrée*.

He had encouraged the men to pursue those various industries and ingenuities which, though they are affectedly considered against "discipline," formed, as he knew well, the best preservative from real insubordination, and the best instrument in humanising and ameliorating the condition of his comrades. The habit of application alone was something gained; and if it kept them only for a while from the haunts of those coarsest debaucheries, which are the only possible form in which the soldier can pursue the forbidden license of vice, it was better than that leisure should be spent in that joyless bestiality which made Cecil, once used to every refinement of luxury and indulgence, sicken with a pitying wonder for those who found in it the only shape they knew of "pleasure."

He had seen from the first, in many men of his *tribu*, capabilities that might be turned to endless uses ; in the conscript drawn from the populace of the provinces there was almost always a knowledge of self-help, and often of some trade, coupled with habits of diligence ; in the soldier made from the street-Arab of Paris there was always inconceivable intelligence, rapidity of wit, and plastic vivacity ; in the adventurers come, like himself, from higher grades of society, and burying a broken career under the shelter of the tricolour, there were continually gifts and acquirements, and even genius, that had run to seed and brought forth no fruit. Of all these France always avails herself in a great degree ; but, as far as Cecil's influence extended, they were developed much more than usual. As his own character gradually changed under the force of fate, the desire for some interest in life grew on him (every man, save one absolutely brainless and self-engrossed, feels this sooner or later) ; and that interest he found, or rather created, in his regiment. All that he could do to contribute to its efficiency in the field he did ; all that he could do to further its internal excellence he did likewise.

Coarseness perceptibly abated, and violence became much rarer in that portion of his corps with which he had immediately to do ; the men gradually acquired from him a better, a higher tone ; they learned to do duties inglorious and distasteful as well as they did those which led them to the danger and the

excitation that they loved; and, having their good faith and sympathy, heart and soul, with him, he met, in these lawless leopards of African France, with loyalty, courage, generosity, and self-abnegation far surpassing those which he had ever met with in the polished civilisation of his early experience.

For their sakes, he spent many of his free hours in the *Chambrée*. Many a man, seeing him, there came and worked at some ingenious design, instead of going off to burn his brains out with brandy, if he had sous enough to buy any, or to do some dexterous bit of thieving on a native, if he had not. Many a time, knowing him to be there, sufficed to restrain the talk around from lewdness and from ribaldry, and turn it into channels at once less loathsome and more mirthful, because they felt that obscenity and vulgarity were alike jarring on his ear, although he had never more than tacitly shown that they were so. A precisian would have been covered with their contumely and ridicule; a saint would have been driven out from their midst with every missile merciless tongues and merciless hands could pelt with; a martinet would have been cursed aloud, and cheated, flouted, rebelled against, on every possible occasion. But the man who was "one of them" entirely, whilst yet simply and thoroughly a gentleman, had great influence—an influence exclusively for good.

The *Chambrée* was empty when he returned; the men were scattered over the town in one of their scant pauses of liberty; there was only the dog of the

regiment, Flick-Flack, a snow-white poodle, asleep in the heat, on a sack, who, without waking, moved his tail in a sign of gratification as Cecil stroked him, and sat down near, betaking himself to the work he had in hand.

It was a stone for the grave of Léon Ramon. There was no other to remember the dead Chasseur; no other beside himself, save an old woman sitting spinning at her wheel under the low-sloping shingle roof of a cottage by the western Biscayan sea, who, as she spun, and as the thread flew, looked with anxious aged eyes over the purple waves where she had seen his father—the son of her youth—go down beneath the waters, and murmured ever and again, "*Il r'viendra ! il r'viendra !*"

But the thread of her flax would be spun out, and the thread of her waning life be broken, ere ever the soldier for whom she watched would go back to her and to Languedoc.

For life is brutal ; and to none so brutal as to the aged who remember so well, yet are forgotten as though already they were amidst the dead.

Cecil's hand pressed the graver along the letters, but his thoughts wandered far from the place where he was. Alone there, in the great sun-scorched barrack-room, the news that he had read, the presence he had quitted, seemed alike a dream.

He had never known fully all that he had lost until he had stood before the beauty of this woman, in whose deep imperial eyes the light of other years

seemed to lie, the memories of other worlds seemed to slumber.

Those blue, proud, fathomless eyes ! Why had they looked on him ? He had grown content with his fate ; he had been satisfied to live and to fall a soldier of France ; he had set a seal on that far-off life of his earlier time, and had grown to forget that it had ever been. Why had chance flung him in her way, that, with one careless haughty glance, one smile of courteous pity, she should have undone in a moment all the work of a half-score years, and shattered in a day the serenity which it had cost him such weary self-contest, such hard-fought victory, to attain ?

She had come to pain, to weaken, to disturb, to influence him, to shadow his peace, to wring his pride, to unman his resolve, as women do mostly with men. Was life not hard enough here already, that she must make it more bitter yet to bear ?

He had been content, with a soldier's contentment, in danger and in duty ; and she must waken the old coiled serpent of restless stinging regret which he had thought lulled to rest for ever !

" If I had my heritage ? " he thought ; and the chisel fell from his hands as he looked down the length of the barrack-room with the blue glare of the African sky through the casement.

Then he smiled at his own folly, in dreaming idly thus of things that might have been.

" I will see her no more," he said to himself. " If

I do not take care, I shall end by thinking myself a martyr—the last refuge and consolation of emasculate vanity, of impotent egotism !”

For though his whole existence was a sacrifice, it never occurred to him that there was anything whatever great in its acceptation, or unjust in its endurance. He thought too little of his life's value, or of its deserts, ever to consider by any chance that it had been harshly dealt with,* or unmeritedly visited.

At that instant Petit Picpon's keen, pale, Parisian face peered through the door, his great black eyes, that at times had so pathetic a melancholy, and at others such a monkeyish mirth and malice, were sparkling excitedly and gleefully.

“ Mon Caporal !”

“ You, Picpon ? What is it ?”

“ *Mon Caporal*, there is great news. *La danse commence là-bas.*”*

“ Ah ! Are you sure ?”

“ Sure, *mon Caporal*. The *Arbicos* want a *fantasia à la clarinette*.† We are not to know just yet : we are to have the *ordre de route* to-morrow. I overheard our officers say so. They think we shall have brisk work. And for that they will not punish the *vieille lame*.”

“ Punish ! Is there fresh disobedience ? In my squadron ; in my absence ?”

* There is fighting broken out yonder.

† A skirmish to the music of musketry.

He rose instinctively, buckling on his sword which he had put aside.

"Not in your *tribu*, mon Caporal," said Picpon, quickly. "It is not much, either. Only the *bon-zig* Rac."

"Rake! What has he been doing?"

There was infinite anxiety and vexation in his voice. Rake had recently been changed into another squadron of the regiment, to his great loss and regret; for not only did he miss the man's bright face and familiar voice from the *Chambrée*, but he had much disquietude on the score of his safety, for Rake was an incorrigible *pratique*, had only been kept from scrapes and mischief by Cecil's influence, and even despite that had been often in hot water, and once even had been drafted for a year or so of chastisement amongst the "*Zéphyr*," a mode of punishment which, but for its separation of him from his idol, would have given unmitigated delight to the audacious offender.

"Very little, mon Caporal!" said Picpon, eagerly. "A mere nothing—a *bagatelle*! Run a Spahi through the stomach, that is all. I don't think the man is so much as dead, even!"

"I hope not, indeed. When will you cease this brawling amongst yourselves? A soldier's blade should never be turned upon men of his own army. How did it happen?"

"*Pour si peu de chose*, mon Caporal. A woman! They quarrelled about a little fruit-seller. The

*homard** was in fault. *Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort* was there before him; and was preferred by the girl; and women should be allowed something to do with choosing their lovers, that I think, though it is true they often take the worst man. They quarrelled; the *homard* drew first; and then, *poufet passe!* quick as thought, Rac lunged through him. He has always a most beautiful stroke. Le Capitaine Argentier was passing, and made a fuss; else nothing would have been done. They have put him under arrest, but I heard them say they would let him free to-night because we should march at dawn."

"I will go and see him at once."

"Wait, *mon Caporal*; I have something to tell you," said Picpon, quickly. "The *zig* has a motive in what he does. Rac wanted to get the *trou*.† He has done more than one bit of mischief only for that."

"Only for what? He cannot be in love with the *trou*?"

"It serves his turn," said Picpon, mysteriously. "Did you never guess why, *mon Caporal*? Well, I have. *Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort* is a *risquetout*.‡ The officers know it; the bureaux know it. He would have mounted, mounted, mounted, and been a Captain long before now, if he had not been a *pratique*."

"I know that; so would many of you."

"Ah, *mon Caporal*; but that is just what Rac

* Spahi.

† Prison.

‡ A fine, fearless soldier.

does not choose. In the books his page beats every man's, except yours. They have talked of him many times for the cross and for promotion; but whenever they do—*cric-crac!* he goes off to a bit of mischief, and gets himself punished. Any *rabiat*,* long or short, serves his purpose. They think him too wild to take out of the ranks. You remember, *mon Caporal*, that splendid thing that he did five years ago at Sabasasta? Well, you know they spoke of promoting him for it, and he would have run up all the grades like a squirrel, and died a *Kébir*,† I dare say. What did he do to prevent it? Why, went that escapade into Oran disguised as a Dervish, and got the *trou* instead."

"To prevent it? Not purposely?"

"Purposely, *mon Caporal*," said Petit Picpon, with a sapient nod that spoke volumes. "He always does something when he thinks promotion is coming—something to get himself out of its way, do you see? And the reason is this: 'tis a good *zig*, and loves you, and will not be put over your head. 'Me rise afore him?' said the *zig* to me once. 'I'll have the *As de pique*‡ on my collar fifty times over first! He's a Prince, and I'm a mongrel got in a gutter! I owe him more'n I'll ever pay, and I'll kill the *Kébir* himself afore I'll insult him that way.' So say little to

* Term of punishment.

† General.

‡ A little mark in black cloth that distinguishes the uniform of the "Incorrigibles."

him about the Spahi, *mon Caporal*. He loves you well, does your Rac."

"Well indeed! Good God! what nobility!"

Picpon glanced at him; then, with the tact of his nation, glided away and busied himself teaching Flick-Flack to shoulder and present arms, the weapon being a long chibouque-stick.

"After all, Diderot was in the right when he told Rousseau which side of the question to take," mused Cecil, as he crossed the barrack-yard a few minutes later to visit the incarcerated *pratique*. "On my life, civilisation develops comfort, but I do believe it kills nobility. Individuality dies in it, and egotism grows strong and specious. Why is it that in a polished life a man, whilst becoming incapable of sinking to crime, almost always becomes also incapable of rising to greatness? Why is it that misery, tumult, privation, bloodshed, famine, beget, in such a life as this, such countless things of heroism, of endurance, of self-sacrifice—things worthy of demigods—in men who quarrel with the wolves for a wild-boar's carcase, for a sheep's offal?"

A question which perplexes, very wearily, thinkers who have more time, more subtlety, and more logic to bring to its unravelment than Bertie had either leisure or inclination to do.

"Is this true, Rake—that you intentionally commit these freaks of misconduct to escape promotion?" he asked of the man when he stood alone with him in his place of confinement.

Rake flushed a little.

"Mischief's bred in me, sir; it must come out. It's just bottled up in me like ale; if I didn't take the cork out now and then, I should fly apieces!"

"But many a time when you have been close on the reward of your splendid gallantry in the field, you have frustrated your own fortunes and the wishes of your superiors by wantonly proving yourself unfit for the higher grade they were going to raise you to; why do you do that?"

Rake fidgeted restlessly, and, to avoid the awkwardness of the question, replied, like a Parliamentary orator, by a flow of rhetoric.

"Sir, there's a many chaps like me. They can't help *nohow* bustin' out when the fit takes 'em. 'Tain't reasonable to blame 'em for it; they're just made so, like a chesnut's made to bust its pod, and a chicken to bust its shell. Well, you see, sir, France she know that, and she say to herself, 'Here are these madcaps, if I keep 'em tight in hand I shan't do nothin' with 'em—they'll turn obstreperous and cram my convict-cells. Now, I want soldiers, I don't want convicts. I can't let 'em stay in the Regulars, 'cause they'll be for making all the army wildfire like 'em; I'll just draft 'em by theirselves, treat 'em different, and let 'em fire away. They've got good stuff in 'em, though too much of the curb riles 'em.' Well, sir, she do that; and aren't the Zéphyr as fine a lot of fellows as any in the service? Of course they are; but if they'd been in England—God bless her, the dear old d—d obsti-

nate soul!—they'd have been druv' crazy along o' pipeclay and razors; *she'd* never have seed what was in 'em, her eyes are so bunged up with routine. If a pup riot in the pack, she's no notion but to double-thong him, and a-course, in double-quick time, she finds herself obliged to go further and hang him. She don't ever remember that it may be only just along of his breedin', and that he may make a very good hound elseways let out a bit, though he'll spile the whole pack if she *will* be a fool and try to make a steady line-hunter of him straight agin his nature."

Rake stopped breathless in his rhetoric, which contained more truth in it, as also more roughness, than most rhetoric does.

"You are right. But you wander from my question," said Cecil, gently. "Do you avoid promotion?"

"Yes, sir, I do," said Rake, something sulkily; for he felt he was being driven "up a corner." "I *do*. I ain't not one bit fitter for an officer than that rioting pup I talk on is fit to lead them crack packs at home. I should be in a strait-waistcoat if I was promoted; and as for the cross—Lord, sir, that would get me into a world o' trouble! I should pawn it for a toss of wine the first day out, or give it to the first *moukiera* that winked her black eye for it! The star put on my buttons suits me a deal better; if you'll believe me, sir, it do."*

* The star on the metal buttons of the insubordinates or Zéphyr.

Cecil's eyes rested on him with a look that said far more than his answer.

"Rake, I know you better than you would let me do, if you had your way. My noble fellow! you reject advancement, and earn yourself an unjust reputation for mutinous conduct, because you are too generous to be given a step above mine in the regiment."

"Who's a been a tellin' you that trash, sir?" retorted Rake, with ferocity.

"No matter who. It is no trash. It is a splendid loyalty of which I am utterly unworthy, and it shall be my care that it is known at the bureaux, so that henceforth your great merits may be——"

"Stow that, sir!" cried Rake, vehemently. "Stow that, *if* you please! Promoted I *won't* be—no, not if the Emperor hisself was to order it, and come across here to see it done! A pretty thing, surely! Me a officer, and you never a one—me a commandin' of you, and you a salutin' of me! By the Lord, sir! we might as well see the camp-scurillions a ridin' in state, and the Marshal a scouring out the soup-pots!"

"Not at all. This Army has not a finer soldier than yourself; you have a right to the reward of your services in it. And I assure you you do me a great injustice if you think I would not as willingly go out under your orders as under those of all the Marshals of the Empire."

The tears rushed into the hardy eyes of the redoubtable "Crache-au-nez-d'la-Mort," though he dashed them away in a fury of eloquence.

“Sir, if you don’t understand as how you’ve given me a power more than all the crosses in the world in sayin’ of them there words, why *you* don’t know *me* much either, that’s all. You’re a gentleman—a right on rare thing that is—and, bein’ a gentleman, a course you’d be too generous and too proud like not to behave well to me, whether I was a servin’ you as I’ve always served you, or a insultin’ of you by ridin’ over your head in that way as we’re speakin’ on. But I know my place, sir, and I know yours. If it wasn’t for that ’ere Black Hawk—damn him!—I can’t help it, sir, I *will* damn him, if he shoot me for it—you’d a been a Chef d’Escadron by now. There ain’t the leastest doubt of it. Ask all the *zigs* what they think. Well, sir, now you know I’m a man what do as I say; if you don’t let me have my own way, and if you do the littlest thing to get me a step, why, sir, I swear as I’m a livin’ bein’, that I’ll draw on Château-roy the first time I see him afterwards, and slit his throat as I’d slit a jackal’s! There!—my oath’s took!”

And Cecil saw that it would also be kept. The natural lawlessness and fiery passion inborn in Rake had of course not been cooled by the teachings of African warfare; and his hate was intense against the all-potent Chief of his regiment, as intense as the love he bore to the man whom he had followed out into exile.

Cecil tried vainly to argue with him; all his reasonings fell like hailstones on a cuirass, and made no more impression; he was resolute.

"But listen to one thing," he urged at last. "Can you not see how you pain me by this self-sacrifice? If I knew that you had attained a higher grade, and wore your epaulettes in this service, can you not fancy I should feel pleasure then (as I feel regret, even remorse, now) that I brought you to Africa through my own follies and misfortunes?"

"Do you, sir? There ain't the least cause for it, then," returned Rake, sturdily. "Lor bless you, sir, why this life's made a purpose for me! If ever a round peg went trim and neat into a round hole, it was when I came into this here Army. I never was so happy in all my days before. They're right on good fellows, and 'll back you to the death if so be as you've allays been share-and-share-alike with 'em, as a *zig* should. As a private, sir, I'm happy and I'm *safe*; as a officer, I should be kicking over the traces, and blunderin' everlastingly. However, there ain't no need to say a word more about it; I've sworn, and you've heerd me swear, sir, and you know as how I shall keep my oath if ever I'm provoked to it by bein' took notice of. I stuck that *homard* just now just by way of a lark, and only 'cause he come where he'd no business to poke his turbaned old pate; 'tain't likely as I shall stop at givin' the Hawk two inches of steel if he comes such a insult over us both as to offer a blackguard like me the epaulettes as you ought to be a wearin'!"

And Cecil knew that it was hopeless either to persuade him to his own advantage or to convince him of

his disobedience in speaking thus of his supreme, before his non-commissioned, officer. He was himself, moreover, deeply moved by the man's fidelity.

He stretched his hand out :

"I wish there were more blackguards with hearts like yours. I cannot repay your love, Rake, but I can value it."

Rake put his own hands behind his back.

"God bless you, sir, you've repaid it ten dozen times over. But you shan't do *that*, sir. I told you, long ago, I'm too much of a scamp! Some day, p'rhaps, as I said, when I've settled scores with myself, and wiped off all the bad 'uns with a clear sweep, tolerably clean. Not afore, sir!"

And Rake was too sturdily obstinate not to always carry his point.

The love that he bore to Cecil was very much such a wild, chivalric, romantic fidelity as the Cavaliers or the Gentlemen of the North bore to their Stuart idols. That his benefactor had become a soldier of Africa in no way lessened the reverent love of his loyalty, any more than theirs was lessened by the adversities of their royal masters. Like theirs, also, it had beauty in its blindness—the beauty that lies in every pure unselfishness.

Meanwhile, Picpon's news was correct.

The regiment was ordered out *à la danse*.* There was fresh war in the interior; and wherever there was the hottest slaughter, there the Black Hawk

* On the march.

always flew down with his falcon-flock. When Cecil left his incorrigible *zig*, the trumpets were sounding an assembly; there were noise, tumult, eagerness, excitement, delighted zest on every side; a general order was read to the enraptured squadrons; they were to leave the town at the first streak of dawn.

There were before them death, deprivation, long days of famine, long days of drought and thirst; parching sun-baked roads; bitter chilly nights; fiery furnace-blasts of sirocco; killing, pitiless, northern winds; hunger, only sharpened by a snatch of raw meat or a handful of maize; and the probabilities, ten to one, of being thrust under the sand to rot, or left to have their skeletons picked clean by the vultures. But what of that? There were also the wild delight of combat, the freedom of lawless warfare, the joy of deep strokes thrust home, the chance of plunder, of wine-skins, of cattle, of women; above all, that lust for slaughter which burns so deep down in the hidden souls of men, and gives them such brotherhood with wolf, and vulture, and tiger, when once its flame bursts forth.

That evening, at the Villa Aïoussa there gathered a courtly assembly, of much higher rank than Algiers can commonly afford, because many of station as lofty as her own had been drawn thither to follow her to what the Princess Corona called her banishment—an endurable banishment enough under those azure skies, in that clear elastic air, and with that charming “*bonbonnière*” in which to dwell, yet still a banishment to the reigning beauty of Paris, to one

who had the habits and the commands of a wholly undisputed sovereignty in the royal splendour of her womanhood.

There was a variety of distractions to prevent ennui; there were half a dozen clever Paris actors playing the airiest of vaudevilles in the Bijou theatre, beyond the drawing-rooms; there were some celebrated Italian singers whom an Imperial Prince had brought over in his yacht; there was the best music; there was wit as well as homage whispered in her ear. Yet she was not altogether amused; she was a little touched with ennui.

"Those men are very stupid. They have not half the talent of that soldier!" she thought once, turning from a Peer of France, an Austrian Archduke, and a Russian diplomatist. And she smiled a little, furling her fan and musing on the horror that the triad of fashionable conquerors near her would feel if they knew that she thought them duller than an African *lascar*!

But they only told her things of which she had been long weary, specially of her own beauty; he had told her of things totally unknown to her, things real, terrible, vivid, strong, sorrowful—strong as life, sorrowful as death.

"Châteauroy and his Chasseurs have an *ordre de route*," a voice was saying, that moment, behind her chair.

"Indeed?" said another. "The Black Hawk is never so happy as when unhooded. When do they go?"

"To-morrow. At dawn."

"There is always fighting here, I suppose?"

"Oh yes. The losses in men are immense; only the journals would get a *communiqué*, or worse, if they ventured to say so in France. How delicious La Doche is! She comes in again with the next scene."

The Princess Corona listened; and her attention wandered further from the Archduke, the Peer, and the diplomatist, as from the vaudeville. She did not find Madame Doche very charming; and she was absorbed for a time looking at the miniatures on her fan.

At the same moment, through the lighted streets of Algiers, Cigarette, like a union of fairy and of fury, was flying with the news. Cigarette had seen the flame of war at its height, and had danced in the midst of its whitest heat, as young children dance to see the fires leap red in the black winter's night. Cigarette loved the battle, the charge, the wild music of bugles, the thunder-tramp of battalions, the sirocco-sweep of light squadrons, the mad *tarantala* of triumph when the slaughter was done, the grand swoop of the Eagles down unto the carnage, the wild hurrah of France.

She loved them with all her heart and soul; and she flew now through the starlit sultry night, crying, "La guerre! La guerre! La guerre!" and chanting to the enraptured soldiery a *Marseillaise* of her

own improvisation, all slang, and doggrel, and bar-rack-grammar ; but fire-giving as a torch, and rousing as a bugle in the way she sang it, waving the tri-colour high above her head :

" Fantasia,
Deo Gratia !
En avant !
On t'attend !
Au cor et à cri
Suivez, mes Spahis !

On s'élance à la danse,
Pour la gloire de la France.
Fusillons,
Bataillons !
Et marchons
Au guidons !
Va, loustic,
Et du cric
Vides ton verre,
À la guerre !

C'est l'Amie du Drapeau
Qui s'appelle son troupeau !
Faisons pouff à l'Emir,
Faisons style à venir,
De l'avoine la moisson,
Portera belle boisson,
Le Zéphyr au douar
F'ra retentir son cor,
Chasse-marais cont' fleurettes
S'emparant des fillettes,
Et sous l'Aigle mes Roumis,
Vont gorger les Arbis,
À la musique si nette
De la haute clarinette !

Razzia,
Grazia,
Est ici,
Mes Soahis,

A l'amour! Aux beaux jours
Rataplan des tambours,
Nous appelle, 'R'lin tintin,
Vite au rire, au butin!"
Vive la gloire!
Vive le boire!
Vive le vin rosé du sang!
Vive le feu volage des rangs!
Vive tout ça qui va nous faire
Paradis au fond d'enfer,
Par la Guerre, par la Guerre!
En avant! Allons! Buons!
En avant! Allons! Mourrons!"

END OF VOL. II.



